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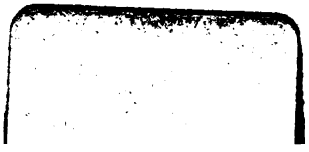

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"She went to the table and took up a card, looked at it for an instant, and then threw it down, and sitting down by the table, folded her arms upon it, and laid her head wearily on them, and stayed quietly."—*See page* 107.

WOMAN'S STRATEGY,

OR

THE FIRST TIME I SAW HER.

A Novel.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY T. MORTEN.

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WOMAN'S STRATEGY.

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CHAPTER I.

THE ADVERTISEMENT.

I HAD what I may call *no end* of answers to my advertisement, though I had put it in such a form as I hoped would attract the select few.

The advertisement was for partial board and lodging in a respectable family. It occupied a conspicuous place in the *Times'* supplement, and had been composed regardless of expense. Smith and I made it out together, after a capital dinner at the "London;" and as Smith is a literary man, and writes for *Punch*, you may be sure it *was* rather out of the common run.

Nevertheless, on that memorable morning I found no less than twenty letters on my

breakfast-table; the next post brought in twenty more, and so on every two hours during the rest of the day. I was offered the best accommodation, the most comfortable of homes, the most excellent cooking, at all terms, in every part of the town, and in all kinds of grammar, writing, and spelling.

One lady, who lived at Hammersmith (I had mentioned the locality required as within ten minutes' drive of Regent Street), informed me that hers might truly be termed a comfortable home, as she was blessed with six daughters, all musical.

Another, who dated her note from Tottenham Court Road, described her house as delightfully situated, the chamber I was to occupy looking out on the road, where the 'busses passed every minute, making it look pleasant and cheerful. In a postscript she also informed me that there were eggs for breakfast every morning. Another, writing in a stiff angular hand, promised everything I required, with the addition of family prayers. One informed me, as a kind of attractive bait, I suppose, that she was a young widow, who, finding "the solitude of home irksome, received two or three persons of station and refinement."

Smith and I read over the whole lot very attentively, and, as Smith said, it was as good as a sermon, for it showed you what an immense amount of lies and humbug, ah! and trouble, too, there is in the world. It took us a couple of hours to finish the reading of them, what with the jokes and witticisms of my friend, and the more sensible remarks of myself. I am a grave man, not much given to laughter or fun, but what I pride myself on is my exquisite sense of the elegant and beautiful. I hate vulgarity; I dread a vulgar man or woman as I dread the devil. I could not live near such a creature if my life depended on it, and, to confess the truth (Smith calls this a weakness), it was on that account I was going to leave my present mode of life as a bachelor in lodgings to become a boarder in a "refined and well-educated family;" so the advertisement ran.

My lodgings were all I could wish, clean, well furnished, in a respectable square, and Mrs. Meggs was an excellent cook; but then she was so decidedly vulgar.

She would come into my room in the morning to know if I intended dining at home, and what I would like for dinner, with her im-

mense form enveloped in a gown made of bed curtains, or stuff like it; her cap half off, her red hair in curl-papers, and her nose — well, all I can say is, Mrs. Meggs did like gin, she confessed to it. Now, if there is one thing more vulgar than another, it's certainly gin. She would rest her hand on her hips and salute me with "Good morning, Muster *Wist;* and what'll you please to want to-day? Why you've not eaten your heggs again!" This took place regularly every morning, as Mrs. Meggs insisted on serving me with eggs, which I can't endure, but to which, rather than have a conversation with her on the subject, I had submitted for long months. If this had been all, I should not have minded so much, but Mrs. Meggs could not, by any manner of means, short of actual force, be induced to leave the room till she had set it what she called "a bit comfortable;" and during that time no one knows what I endured from that woman's vulgarity. Subjects the holiest, the most sublime, on which I had written papers that had drawn tears from the coldest, were hashed, mangled, degraded in every form by that vulgar woman.

Some might have called her a philosopher,

"She looked up at us, the remains of a smile of intense fun on her face."—*See page* 19.

her views of life were certainly sharply defined and expressed — but I called her vulgar; she herself said, "I'm no green un, I ain't."

If Mrs. Meggs had kept her tortures for my private moments, I could have borne it, but she had no sense of propriety. At no time was I safe from that dreadful woman's intrusion. When I had friends calling, when I had friends dining, at any time or under any circumstances, I was never safe from Mrs. Meggs's dreadful jokes and dreadful sarcasms.

Sometimes it would be in smiling, pleasant manner to bring up the coals; at others with a severe look, to know if any "gent" was "hill," as the bell was "ranged" like to break it, to bring the house down. And once or twice it was *after* Mrs. Meggs had been to call on her friend who lived in the City Road near the "Eagle."

All my friends knew my foible; and the compliments I received on the choice of my landlady were incessant and cutting, and so at length I inserted the advertisement.

Smith and I carefully set aside the worst spelt and written, and in the most objectionable localities, and then getting into a "Han-

som," determined to devote a few hours to answer the other notes in person.

We went first to the "young widow." She was civil, and not bad looking, but things looked what Smith called skimp; so after ten minutes' conversation, in which I promised to take her obliging offer into consideration, we took our leave. I heard her say to Smith in the passage, "I have taken a great fancy to your friend; I should like him very much to join our little party."

Smith said it was "blarney." I rather liked that widow.

Then we drove to Russell Square, and then to Marylebone Road, Devonshire Street, &c., &c. I found all the people miserably poor, or dreadfully vulgar.

"It's more difficult than I thought," I said to Smith, as after dinner we smoked our cigars at the open windows, "and it's shocking to find vulgarity so prevalent among the middle classes of England."

Puff, puff, went Smith's cigar as a reply; and I was just about to commence a rather long discourse on the subject, when the postman's knock made us start.

"Some more, I suppose," I said to Smith.

I heard Mrs. Meggs coming up stairs. I was frightened. I had not yet taken my landlady into my confidence, and I feared she would suspect. "Another hanswer to the advertisement, Muster Wist," she said, in a dry, bitter tone, and with a scornful toss of her head. I said humbly, "Thank you, Mrs. Meggs," and I assure you in that instant Mrs. Meggs was not vulgar, and there was almost dignity in the way she went out of the room. There was something about her which said, "I've discovered your treachery, and I scorn you as you deserve."

"Under different circumstances, Smith," I began to observe, "that woman might have" —

"Oh, yes, no doubt, but open the 'hanswer,' old fellow," interrupted my friend.

It was written in a gentleman's handwriting — the first male letter I had received. It ran, "A private family, residing at H—— Terrace, can offer the accommodations advertised for in yesterday's *Times*. If E. W. will appoint a time, the gentleman will call on him, to give any information that may be desired, or should E. W. prefer calling at H—— Terrace, he will be received any time after 7 o'clock P. M., or before 10 A. M.

"Devilish cool, I must say," said Smith, slowly, as I finished reading. "I'd almost bet it's a case of genteel poverty."

"Before ten in the morning, too! Ridiculous!" I said. We were both silent for a moment, then Smith looked at his watch. "Eight o'clock, West," said he, impressively, "I'm very much mistaken if this," and he thumped the letter, "isn't your man; there's no vulgarity here, you may depend. It's clearly written; no humbug; within the distance of Regent Street you named, and not sent off in that devilish snatch-at-him haste all the rest of them are. Lewis, my boy, put on your hat. Your partial board and lodging is to be found at H—— Terrace."

I was deeply impressed by Smith's manner as well as words, and so I silently put on my hat, and out we went together. H—— Terrace was a short but not narrow street, running out of —— Road. The houses were small, but not mean-looking, and from the dining-room window of No. 3 issued a pleasant, private, family-looking light.

"I do believe I've found it, Smith," said I, as I knocked. We could hear a slight rustling in the passage, and a female voice said,

"Phil, come in, sir, directly!" and then a door banged, and all was still.

I sent in my card with the "Answer," by the servant girl, and then the back-parlor door opened, and a gentleman with a remarkably neat-looking small head, but dressed with more regard to ease than elegance, came forward and bowed. I said something about advertisement in *Times*, and the gentleman begged me to walk in.

It was a small room, certainly, and not very well furnished; the gentleman was very grave, but he *was* a gentleman. I could see that, not only by his own manner, but by the way, in which Smith addressed him. Smith instinctively scents out a man's position, and treats him accordingly.

The gentleman said he was a widower, with grown-up daughters and two younger children; that being rather reduced in circumstances, he wished to let some of his house, but that he could also give partial board if required. That room, he said, would always be at my private disposal if I desired, otherwise I could join the family circle. The room was not very inviting, and the bedroom was

gloomy, and for these and breakfast and supper the grave gentleman asked thirty-five shillings a week.

It was a good deal; but then I thought they didn't seem vulgar or very poor. Still I hesitated. We were all three sitting in the back parlor, rather silent, the gentleman, with one hand in his trousers pocket, looking very grave and stern. I think it was really a trial for him to have to treat on such matters, and I dare say he thought sadly of the "family circle" about to be broken, and the poor dear grown-up daughters. Still he was firm to the thirty-five shillings. Smith looked grim, too, and I was equally unsmiling-looking, when suddenly a merry voice in the next room said, "What a time that wretch stays!"

I rose immediately. "I fear, sir, your terms are rather beyond my means; however, if you will allow me to consider and call to-morrow evening, I shall be obliged."

"As you please, sir," the gentleman replied. "As I said before, my object in admitting strangers into my family is remuneration. Good-night, gentlemen." He closed the door behind us, and we went towards the passage.

We heard a foot on the stairs, and then a tall, young person brushed by, and went to open the hall door.

The young person wore no cap, her hair was plaited in thick plaits on either side of her face, and as she laid one thin soft-looking hand on the handle, she looked up at us, the remains of a smile of intense fun still lingering on her face. She opened the door. "Hum!" said Smith in a very pleasant and respectful tone, and raising his hat; "can you tell us if there is a cab-stand near?"

"I don't know; but there are always plenty of cabs in the —— Road," replied the voice, softly, that had called me a wretch. "Oh, ah! thank you," said Smith, lingering a little; but the young person looked sedately down at the door handle; so once again raising his hat, Smith said, "Good evening;" and we went down the steps.

"Lewis," he exclaimed, "you, who profess to have such an intense admiration for the sublime and beautiful, are an immense humbug!"

"I'm obliged to you," I answered, stiffly.

"Did you observe that young person who opened the door?" he asked, after a pause.

"Yes; a pretty-enough girl for a housemaid."

"And the father?"

"Genteel poverty," I answered, curtly.

"Lewis West," said my friend, impressively, "it was the beautiful and sublime."

CHAPTER II.

THE YOUNG PERSON IN THE OMNIBUS.

THE next day I was going down to the city in an omnibus, still very undecided what to do about my board and lodging, when who should get in and take the seat opposite to me but the young person with plaits from No. 3, H —— Terrace. She was accompanied by a very young man, something between a man and a boy, but not altogether a hobbledehoy, for the young fellow had something self-possessed and pleasant about him that showed, though young, he knew a little more than mere school life could have taught him. His sister, for I saw the young person was his sister, gave me one keen look out of a pair of dark handsome eyes, and then turned away. She looked very grave to-day. Last night I thought her seventeen or eighteen, to-day I could have sworn she was twenty-three or twenty-four.

It was not the sedate gravity either some girls put on in public conveyances; there was something dogged yet sad about it: the boy, too, looked uneasy.

I thought of the meanly-furnished back parlor, and the reduced circumstances, and then I noticed the young person held a book in her hand — a French grammar. "Probably a governess," I thought. Now, practically, I detest governesses; theoretically I esteem them.

In books, and newspaper articles, and educational reviews, I have read enough to draw tears from stones, of the excellences and hardships of these deserving females. I have been perfectly persuaded that in spite of appearances they were elegant women; that in spite of snubbing they were generally esteemed by the estimable, and in a word they were real ladies; but, practically — well all I can say is, that among no class have I met with more vulgarity. Smith says — he said it as he was smoking a cigar and drinking his third glass of grog, and Smith becomes very tender and reasonable under such circumstances — "The class you speak of, my dear West, is a frightfully mixed class; you can

no more define a woman's rank by saying she's a governess than you can describe her personal appearance. These are of all sorts, and, more shame to us, the lower sort greatly preponderate; the real ladies are at the rate of five per cent.; if, therefore, you do find the general run vulgar, it is not astonishing."

Well, I thought of these words of Smith as I sat opposite the young person. I certainly tried to set her among the five per cent., for I must confess there was something in the carriage of the head, in the cast of the features, which I dared not for an instant call vulgar; but then her gloves, her old shawl, her almost dirty dress, all so untidily put on! I always picture a real lady, neat.

As the omnibus approached Tottenham Court Road the young person pulled out her purse and gave her brother sixpence to pay for both.

"I shall walk home, Willie," she said, "unless I succeed; but you, if she's in a bad temper, I shan't ask. Stop the man here. Good-by, and don't forget the cocoa, and coffee and sugar."

Her brother helped her out, but she needed little assistance, and afterwards I saw her

skipping across the dirty road, with her dress caught up so as to expose all the wires of her crinoline, utterly heedless of the effect it might have on the public or me.

I went to the City and did my business, which was to go to the Bank, and returned home just at a time when the omnibusses were very empty; and indeed, just before we reached Tottenham Court Road, I had the "bus" all to myself. I couldn't help wondering if the young person had succeeded, and would drive home. As I neared the corner, lo! and behold! there she stood on the edge of the pavement, among a group of questionable-looking people waiting for our arrival.

She jumped in with a spring, and I noticed she held the purse in her hand, as if to keep it safe, for it was much fuller than in the morning; and in its bulging sides, and in her contented and now young-looking face, I read a little history. And, would you believe it, my heart hardened within me, and I determined not to go to No. 3, H—— Terrace. Think of the misery there must be, that will darken the faces of the grown-up daughters, and sour the papa! Distress can't dwell

" —— and then went to the grate and lit the fire. '—*See page* 33.

in a house without directly or indirectly annoying every one of its inmates, whispered my egotistical self. As I was thinking all this over, and looking most determinedly out of the window, the young person suddenly broke in on my meditations with —

"Can I take any message for you to papa? it will save you the trouble of calling."

"Thank you," I stammered; "but to tell the truth, I am still undecided." I looked up as I spoke. What a confounded fool I was to say I was undecided to that decided looking girl. A ghost of a smile flitted across her face.

"Then we still have a chance?" she said. "I'm glad of it, for papa's sake."

"And not for yours," I ventured to say — I hardly know why; but I could not help feeling I was talking to a pretty girl, and you know it is so difficult to keep to business in such cases.

"Well, no," she answered coolly enough. "You see we're a number of girls; we've always been accustomed to live easily and without restraint, and a stranger will necessarily be rather a bore; still," she added quickly, "I'd rather have a gentleman than a

lady, and papa seems decided on one or the other."

"Then after all, I shall be welcome," I said pleasantly. I couldn't resist the voice.

"Yes, as the lesser evil," was the laconic reply. "Would you be at home much?" she asked after a pause.

"No, and I could stay in the back parlor," I replied, piqued.

"It isn't very comfortable, certainly," she said; "still." —— There was another pause; then suddenly she asked me if I had seen "Our American Cousin," and then she launched forth into a capital criticism on the play and actors; she was quite witty and her sarcasms keen; then suddenly she relapsed into silence, the "bus" neared the Edgeware Road, and she prepared to get out.

"Well," she said, "you shan't be banished to your back parlor. Shall I tell papa to call on you, or will you come to our house this evening, to settle everything?"

I was taken aback; I had not at all determined to take No. 3 for a home; still I never hesitated — I dared not, under that keen eye. "Thank you, if Mr. Bush will call this evening at eight" ——

"Oh, certainly. Good afternoon." The young person quite smiled, I fancied, triumphantly; and I'm sure, notwithstanding my usual strict sense of honor, if I could have washed my hands of No. 3, H—— Terrace, I certainly should — I felt such a profound dread of that young person.

Smith and Wells dropped in after dinner, and to them I recounted my omnibus adventure, without, however, mentioning how the young person had managed to extract my assent. I made up a most touching history of her seeming distress, and of youthful beauty, and rather put it on the head of kind-heartedness and charity, than of coercion, which in reality it was.

Smith didn't take much interest in the matter. Your witty, brilliant individuals soon forget the affairs of their friends, when they cease to be amused by them, and what Smith warmly advocated one day he very often forgot the next.

This was a trait in my friend that would often have thrown a shadow over our friendship had it not been for my philosophy. "Take things as you find them: if they don't

please you, get out of their way; but to attempt to correct or right them is a nuisance and a folly." I wrote this in my note-book at sixteen years of age, and I confess at twenty-six I'm not ashamed of them; there is the germ of an amount of wisdom that would not have disgraced the teens of Solomon.

Wells is a very soft kind of fellow; my history really interested him. He asked all kinds of questions about the young person, and praised me vehemently for going to live at No. 3.

I regard Wells as an embryo philanthropist, if ever he has the courage or energy to emerge from boyhood. At present he is twenty-three, and yet you might certainly take him for seventeen; his face is as smooth as a girl's; he talks in a quiet, boyish manner, has as absurd reverence for everything other men laugh at, and yet all in such a quiet inoffensive manner, that I confess I can't call him an ass; it would seem as bad to abuse one's sister.

Well, Mr. Bush came; Smith smoked away soberly, and Wells lay full length on the sofa, contemplating us as we made our

arrangements. Mr. Bush was still grave, but at times he condescended to make a facetious remark, and then I thought he looked very much like the young person.

CHAPTER III.

THE FAMILY CIRCLE.

IT was on a pouring evening that I took up my abode at No. 3. The gutters ran like little rivers; the gas looked quite dim through the misty atmosphere, and scarcely a soul was to be seen abroad. The idea of a family circle on such a night was particularly pleasant.

I pictured to myself the drawing-room of No. 3, well lighted, with a glowing fire, two or three handsome girls collected near it, working, or talking to the respectable-looking papa, and perhaps an open piano, with a pretty performer who might accompany my much-admired tenor.

Alas for human expectations! A faint light issued from the kitchen window as I stopped at No. 3; all the rest of the house was in darkness; even the hall lamp was not lighted, and I went stumbling into the pas-

sage over the servant-girl, and upset the umbrella-stand with a crash. The noise brought Mr. Bush with a candle and apologies; but as I followed him up-stairs to my bed-room, I most devoutly thanked Heaven I was only bound for a month as lodger in H —— Terrace.

I stayed fidgetting in my room for nearly an hour, and then, still feeling very cross and disagreeable, descended to the parlor.

On the stairs I met a figure dripping from every bugle. I never saw a person more "completely saturated," as the saying is. I stood sideways to let her pass, fearful of catching cold by her mere presence; but the young person lighting her candle, so that the light fell full on her wet hair and damp face, looked up at me with such a comical expression of amused contempt, that I felt obliged to say something.

"How wet you are!" I said, shrinking back a little farther still.

"Yes, I couldn't get a 'bus, so I was obliged to walk from Tottenham Court Road — without an umbrella too."

To hear her talk in that unrefined way, and yet to be under the gaze of such eyes, was

like the action of two opposite and equal forces: so, following the laws of motion, I stood still.

"Do you know," she said, after a pause, "that your first act on entering the house was one of damage? You have broken the umbrella-stand."

"Your own fault entirely," I replied; "the gas should have been lighted."

"And wasn't it?"

"No."

"Provoking!" she exclaimed, angrily; "unless I am at home everything goes wrong. But you," she added, "must be very awkward. Why, I can go about anywhere in the dark."

This was said quite gravely, so I felt offended.

"I suppose I can go into the parlor?" I said, stiffly.

"Oh yes — at least, oh no — the lamp's not lighted yet, and you'll go breaking something else. You must wait till I come down to light it."

"I really must say," I exclaimed, angrily, "the way in which you treat me is most extraordinary."

"You will find everything in this house *is* very extraordinary; at least according to your ideas," answered the young person, coldly, moving up a step — "but if you don't like it you can leave it."

"Of which permission I shall certainly avail myself," I replied, haughtily.

She turned and looked down at me with those peculiar eyes of hers — then a satisfied kind of smile swept across her face, making it look absolutely beautiful for a moment. "As you please," she said; "all I request is, that you don't mention it to my father till the end of the week."

She moved on another step or two; then she paused, apparently considering something. "Come up," she said; "I will show you a room to wait in till I go down to light the lamp." Angry as I felt, there was something about the girl's voice, when she spoke in her natural tone, that I could not help yielding to; so, very sulkily, I followed her up to the second story.

She opened the door of a small room, telling me to come in, and then, dripping as she was, stood and lighted a small but very elegant lamp on the table, and then went to the grate and lit the fire.

She never spoke, but went about her work with the speed and skill of one quite accustomed to it. Meanwhile I looked round the room.

There were bookcases, a pair of globes, a number of small plaster-of-Paris busts, some plants, a cage of birds, a glass globe with goldfish, a table, a large arm-chair that gave one the idea it had some mysterious way of turning itself into a bed, and two cane chairs. The furniture struck me.

"There," said the young person, as the fire broke out into a bright flame, "that will burn."

"Thank you," I said, politely. "But really I am very selfish to keep you here in your wet clothes."

"How kind you are!" she replied; "but what a pity it is you didn't think of it before!" And with a glance, the nature of which I can only describe as exceedingly unpleasant, the young person went out of the room, and left me to my meditations.

That the young person, or lady, or whatever she was, disliked, and in a great measure despised me, I felt only too certain. Now I don't mind being disliked. We dislike things that are injurious to us; and being capable

of injuring rather implies superiority. But to be despised is exceedingly disagreeable — particularly by an object universal opinion pronounces inferior.

As I thought over the whole history of our short acquaintance, an idea struck me.

The young person had candidly acknowledged to me the dislike she and all her sisters entertained for the plan of taking lodgers. She had also said that her father being determined on it they were obliged to give in. Suppose the neglect and rudeness of the family on my arrival was a little scheme of the young ladies to dislodge me — make me leave of my own accord, and so prove to their father the unfeasibility of his plan!

I thought of the scrutinizing glance of the young person when we met in the omnibus, as if she were studying my disposition most carefully; and of her after-determination to get me as a lodger; adding all this to her present snubs and rudeness, and to her request that I should not speak to her father till the end of the week, I felt quite inclined to this opinion.

All my friends say I am a firm man (foes call me obstinate), and the idea of this silent

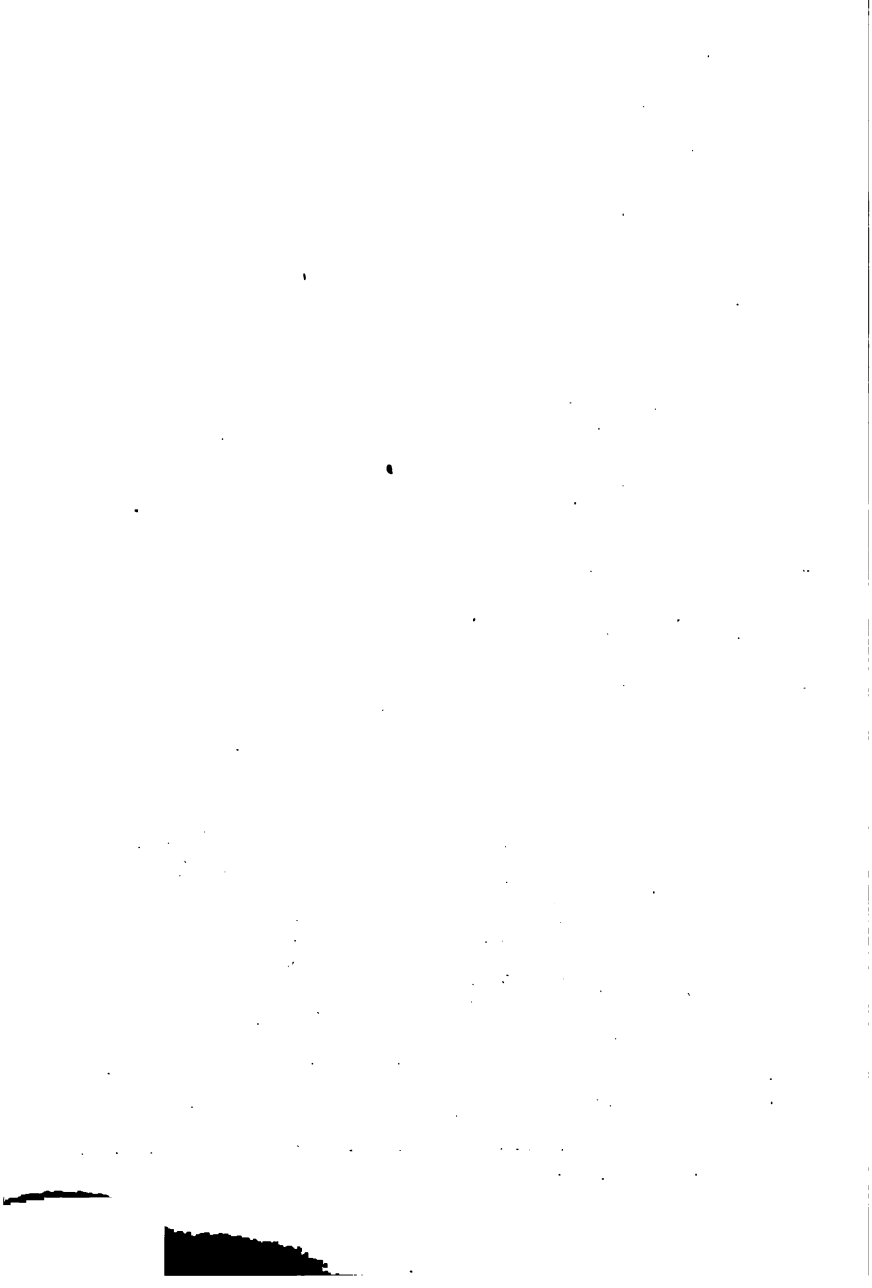
kind of war roused me. It should be war on both sides. I would neither fly nor demand peace. Man and woman's wit should fight it out. So I decreed. Once determined, I threw myself in the arm-chair, and tried to form some plan of defence.

I could not determine whether to brave it out and put the dear grown-up daughters to their wits' end for a means to get rid of me, or to do the *amiable* — make them all in love with me, and then one morning make my triumphant bow and exit.

I walked about the room thinking it over, and by chance I stopped before the collection of little busts. I found them arranged in groups according to their epochs, and each epoch subdivided into classes of poets, historians, philosophers, &c.

Then I wandered on to the bookcase: there were scientific, historical, and poetical works, beside a large number of novels. As I stood beside the bookcase the door opened quickly and the young person appeared. Her hair was neatly arranged in thick plaits on each side of her face — what dress she wore I could not discover, for she was wrapped in a large black shawl. If anything looks un-

"—— and began talking to her in such a low tone that I could not catch a word."—*See page* 38.



tidy to wear in the house, in my estimation, it is a shawl.

"You can come down now," she said. So we went out of the room together.

"I had better take your arm to guide you to a seat," said the young person, as we reached the parlor door; "and I will tell papa to restrain his civilities till I bring the lamp."

She put her hand on my arm, and I felt very much inclined to press it as a punishment for her freedom.

The room was not quite dark, and I could just distinguish two or three forms through the gloom.

"You had better not move, papa, till we have lights," said my conductress; "it annoys Mr. West to make any movement in the dark. You are close to the sofa, and may safely sit down," she added to me.

When the lamp came, borne by the servant-girl, and followed by the young person, I discovered no less than four grown-up daughters in the room, the very young man of the omnibus, and the papa. That was the family circle.

Mr. Bush received me cordially enough,

but the young ladies seemed either shy or sulky.

The young person went to a distant corner, where the youngest daughter sat in a pillowed arm-chair, and began talking to her in such a low tone that I could not catch a word. But it must have been interesting, to judge from the brightening looks of her pale listener.

One of the girls proceeded to make tea, and to hold a distant, unconcerned kind of conversation with me on the state of the weather; while the eldest lounged in her chair opposite me, and apparently found great satisfaction in shading her eyes from the light with both hands, her elbows resting on the table, while she read the newspaper. Once she looked up at me, and then I saw one of the most beautiful faces I have ever met in this living, breathing world. It was like a picture — one of Raphael's Madonnas warmed into life.

"It will be too late to go up-stairs to-night if you don't make haste with the tea, Emily," said the young person suddenly.

"It's your own fault if we are late, Edith," answered the tea-maker, nowise hurrying.

'You came home so late, and have been so long undressing."

Edith — for so I found the young person was called — came up to the table with rather a stormy look about the eyes, but she didn't say anything.

"No music to-night, anyhow, for me," she exclaimed, taking a cup of tea and sitting down by me. "Do you care for music, Mr. West?"

Of course I was an enthusiast about it. Every man who thinks he can sing is.

"Well, I give you leave to play on my piano when you like, which, let me tell you, was not in the terms of the agreement."

I scarcely knew what to reply. The tone was not gracious, so I should like to have refused her offered favor bluntly, after her own fashion; but a man can't be rude to a girl in the presence of her father. So I said nothing.

"You are scarcely polite, Edith," said Mr. Bush, suddenly joining in our conversation. "Agreements of the kind we made with Mr. West should not be constantly mentioned. Besides, neither party, as yet, have acted in a take-and-give manner."

Edith shrugged her shoulders. "I always thought business arrangements were to be treated in a business manner," she replied.

I remembered my determination made in the little room up-stairs, so I turned to the young lady:

"Thank you; but I mean to order a piano for myself. I suppose you will have no objection to its being placed in my own room or the back parlor. Truth to tell, I am very particular as to what instrument I use. I have an exceedingly delicate ear."

"Really!" laconically replied Miss Edith, as she rose from the table with the amused look in her eyes, and a glance at the organ in question.

"Nelly," she added, in a soft, kind voice, and going to the girl in the arm-chair, "will you like to come up-stairs now?" As the young girl rose from her seat, and walked arm-in-arm with her sister across the room, I saw by her manner that she was blind.

It was not a blindness that made the delicate face dreadful. The violet eyes were open, and fringed with such long dark lashes that, keeping them half closed, as she always did, one could almost have imagined that it

was the dreamy, hazy look of short sight. And she had that sweet, sad expression about her face that so often accompanies blindness.

As she passed, all the family rose and kissed her, and Edith led her to me. "Good-night," she said, with a smile. It was the first that had been bestowed on me since my arrival, and I treasured it accordingly.

CHAPTER IV.

WOMAN'S WIT.

THE next morning, when I came down to breakfast, I found only Mr. Bush, Agnes, and Emily. The table was laid with care, but the service did not all match — the butter was served on a plate instead of a proper dish, and the spoons were — well! they were *not* silver. Emily headed the table, and Agnes sat opposite to me, eating bread-and-butter in a lazy manner, and occasionally casting inquisitive glances at me. I felt as if she were counting how many chops and how much bread-and-butter I ate, for Edith to calculate the expense of my breakfast. I was ashamed of my appetite, yet I determined to eat as much as I could, were it only out of malice.

Towards the end of breakfast, the young person (I can't help calling her the young person — it comes so naturally) came in for

an instant with her bonnet and shawl on, and squeezing her fingers into gloves evidently suffering from last night's wetting.

"Good morning," she said. "I'm off, papa. If I don't return by six o'clock, don't wait dinner for me." Then she popped out again, and I heard her slam the door and run down the steps with the speed of lightning.

In the evening, I saw about as much of Edith as I had on the previous one, and the other young ladies not making any advances towards cordiality, I found it slow. Emily was the most talkative, but she was stupid; and beautiful as Agnes was, I grew tired of merely looking at her. The next day was the same, and so on for a week. I felt I was living in a private family, but I certainly was not of them. The woman's wit was having the best of it. I was bound for a month; but I began to waver about carrying on such an unexciting kind of war.

Saturday, I happened to come home earlier than usual, and then, to my astonishment, I heard Edith's voice on the stairs. We met. "Ah!" she said in a pleasant voice, "Saturday is a half holiday for you, too, then?"

"I always take one, certainly," I replied.

"And I am *given* mine. Well, as long as we get it, the how or why is of no consequence, I suppose." As she spoke, she began rolling up her sleeves, and then I noticed she had got her dress pinned up as cooks have when they wash down the steps of a house.

"What are you going to do?" I asked, in a very respectful manner.

"Make the pies for to-morrow, to be sure. I can assure you, you wouldn't like Ann's pastry."

"And is that how you employ your half-holiday?" I asked, almost sorrowfully.

"What are you going to do?" she asked, by way of reply.

"To take a ride in Rotten Row," I answered.

"And is that how you employ your half-holiday?" And down stairs she ran, swift as an antelope, passing her hand along the balustrades. When she arrived at the bottom, she stopped, and held up her white hand. "I forgot to dust them," she exclaimed; "now I must wash my hands again." She said it in such a natural tone that I was disgusted. And then my horse came to the

door; and happening to look down at the kitchen as I mounted, I saw the young person standing with her arms in a yellow basin, and her hands all doughy, just before the window, and she looked up and smiled in the most quizzical, impertinent manner possible.

The next day was Sunday. Breakfast was later, and all assembled to it — even the blind girl. She sat by Edith, and I noticed the constant but quiet attention Edith paid her. It was a much livelier party than usual; even Agnes roused a little, and spoke, though in a quiet, lazy manner, as if the exertion was almost intolerable. Emily was very nearly brilliant, and poor Nelly laughed and joked so joyously with Willie, I began to feel less strange among them, and was trying to talk to Edith, when a low double knock came at the door.

"Go and open the door, Willie; it's Mr. Grainger's knock," said Emily.

"Why can't you let Ann go?" exclaimed Edith, impatiently, but too late, for Willie was off, and in a moment returned with a rather handsome man.

His was one of those refined chiselled faces which immediately give you the idea of

intellect; but I thought the harmony of the countenance much disturbed by the keen, restless eyes, and the sarcastic turn of the thin-lipped mouth. Mr. Bush received him with a kind of constrained cordiality.

Edith put out her hand, and said, in the gracious but easily free manner so characteristic of the true lady, "Come and sit by me, Mr. Grainger; you favor the others week days, so Sunday is mine by rights."

I did not at all approve of the confidential smile the gentleman for a moment turned on Edith, as he took his place beside her. Her father didn't see it, but Mr. Grainger seemed to care very little if I witnessed it or not.

After his arrival, Edith's conversation was less than ever for me.

We sat over breakfast till the bells began to ring for morning service, and still no one offered to move. Edith and Grainger talked on perpetually, keeping almost all the conversation to themselves, while we listened. Edith's manner was completely changed. She was gay, courteous, and perfectly lady-like. I could scarcely believe her to be identical with the young person I had met in the dripping condition on the stairs, and who I had

seen yesterday making pies in front of the kitchen window. Mr. Bush spoke little, and he seemed relieved when I, tired of the very unconspicuous part I was playing, rose from the table, pleading an engagement; and he left the room with me.

How long Mr. Grainger stayed, I know not. When I came home to dinner at six o'clock, Edith had resumed her annoying manner; but I noticed she seemed in a great hurry to get off to church, which was surprising, as at a little past seven Mr. Grainger walked in again. He seemed vexed, though not altogether surprised at her absence, and set himself to talk to Agnes.

As for me, I retired to the back parlor to smoke a cigar; and then Smith called, and we passed the evening together.

At about nine o'clock we heard the young ladies return from church, and through the slight folding-doors we could distinctly hear Edith enter the other room hurriedly, and say, "Good night, Mr. Grainger: you must excuse me this evening; Nelly is not well."

Soon after, Mr. Grainger left. Of course I had told Smith about the Bushes, and more particularly about Edith. He quite agreed

with me that the young ladies had some scheme to turn me out, and he suggested that this Grainger might be in the plot, and, indeed, the cause of it. Having settled this to our own satisfaction, and agreed that it would be better to stay on another month, just for the fun of the thing, we refilled our glasses, lighted fresh cigars, and began talking of other things, when we heard a step come lightly down stairs.

"That's Edith, I'm certain," I said.

"All safe?" asked the young person, as she entered the next room.

"Yes," answered Agnes; "he left soon after he knew you would not appear again. Why wouldn't you come?"

"Because I felt I could not play my part well to-night. It was more prudent to keep out of the way. Oh, Agnes! isn't this sickening?"

We could hear a deep sigh, almost sob, follow.

"For God's sake, Edith, don't you get downhearted," said Agnes, earnestly; "what is the matter to-night?"

There was a silence of two or three minutes, then Edith said, "I came down on pur-

"—— she retired to the back room, and occupied herself in some mysterious manner. It was not with work or reading, or exactly writing."—*See page* 60.

pose to tell you. I have bad news. You must tell papa to-morrow. Mrs. Denham has given me warning!"

"Given you warning!" Agnes' voice sank as she spoke. "Oh, Edith, how can we get on?"

"I have another week still, and there's Mr. West's money; but we shan't be able to save. Do you know, Agnes, I could not have been civil to Grainger to-night."

There was a pause; then Agnes said, "Papa will be so vexed. And why does Mrs. Denham turn you off?"

"Terms too high; and yet, God knows, I gave work enough for the money."

Another pause. Presently, Edith exclaimed, "I say, Agnes, is Mr. West still in the back room?"

"No, I think not; but—" Agnes' voice suddenly sank to a whisper. We heard a step cross the room, evidently on tiptoe, and there was the slightest little rustle by the folding-doors—the young person was evidently reconnoitering through the keyhole. Smith and I felt very uncomfortable, and I was again utterly disgusted. A few minutes after, we heard the two girls go up stairs together.

I think the young person knew how well conversation, carried on in an ordinary tone, could be heard through those folding-doors, for she was more disagreeable than ever during the next two or three days. Certainly, it might have been the effects of losing her situation. She appeared just for tea in the evening, and during that half hour was barely civil to me, and gloomy even with her sisters. I can't say I found my home in a private family very agreeable.

Still there was something so out of the common way about Edith and her conduct, and, indeed, about the whole family, that I kept to my resolution of staying on, and Smith encouraged me to do so. H—— Terrace was a more convenient distance from his abode than my former lodgings: he could easily lounge in of an evening, and spend an hour or two with me in the back parlor, smoking my cigars and drinking my brandy-and-water; and Smith always consulted his convenience, especially when it combined economy with it.

Now I don't mean for an instant to insinuate that Smith was mean or grasping. He was a clever fellow, with a turn for the literary, and you know such fellows are generally

poor. There was no harm in his being poor either, or remaining poor, if he liked; but there was harm in his having such expensive habits.

He never smoked but the very best cigars, and those constantly: and he never drank but the choicest wines and brandy, and those not in small quantities. He would ride, and drive, and go to the opera, &c., on to the end of the chapter. Fortunately, he had a kind of attractive power over rich people. All his friends and acquaintances were rich; and as he observed to me one day, "You see, Lewis, my boy, it's rather convenient."

CHAPTER V.

IN WHICH OUR SIDE GETS REINFORCED.

THE second Monday after our overhearing the conversation between Agnes and Edith, the latter appeared at the breakfast-table. She headed it too, and I must acknowledge that the coffee was much hotter and stronger, and the table much better laid and supplied than when Emily managed it. I thought I ought to appear surprised, though I had quite expected to see her there; so I put on a smiling look, and said, —

"Why, it is not Sunday, is it?"

Edith did not call me "hypocrite," but she looked it, as, without a word, she turned her back on me, and sat down to the table. I suppose Agnes understood that look, for she was colder than ever, and even silly Emily looked grave.

No one spoke till Nelly came down and

took her usual place; then she turned to me, and said, —

"Do you know, Mr. West, Georgy is coming home to-day?"

"And who is Georgy?" I asked.

"Why, one of us — our sister, to be sure. You can't have listened much to our conversation, Mr. West," she added reproachfully, "or you would have heard us speak of Georgy. You know she is coming home for — that is, till she can find something else."

"Our affairs can't interest Mr. West, Nelly dear," said Edith.

I pretended not to hear her remark, but turned to Nelly, and paid great attention to all she said. She told me that Georgy was a year younger than Edith, but much shorter, and that she was very gay and noisy.

When I returned home in the evening, I met Edith coming out of the drawing-room, with her sleeves tucked up after the fashion of house-maids, when they are doing what they call their "work." She did not look at all vexed at seeing me; on the contrary, she pointed into the drawing-room, which looked very comfortable, with its drawn curtains and lighted lamp, and said, —

"We shall sit in the drawing-room for the future, Mr. West; at least, whilst I am at home to arrange it. I dare say you will find it more suitable to your ideas of propriety to pass the evenings there than in the parlor."

"It is certainly more agreeable," I replied stiffly; "still I am sorry that you should perform such uncongenial work on my account."

"Oh! it is not only on your account. I myself detest sitting with a number of persons in a small room. It is to give myself the luxury of being a lady in the evening that I act the house-maid in the morning. A questionable display of refinement, perhaps, you will think; however, such is the case."

She gathered up her old dress more tightly as she spoke, and swept down stairs with the dignity of a queen.

I could not make out the change from amused contempt to bitter disdain with which she treated me. I have never lived much with women, certainly never studied their peculiarities. I know their general qualities and distinguishing marks and weaknesses as only books teach them, so if I could not understand Edith Bush I may be excused. If I had known then what I know now of

womankind, I should have seen that I personally had very little to do with this change in her temper. I should have guessed that there was some constant anxiety annoying and harassing her, which, acting on a naturally fiery and unbending disposition, produced the effect I noticed.

* * * * * * * *

I went down to the drawing-room about half-past seven, and there I found a small, imp-like looking being, dressed in a light flounced muslin with pink ribbons, comfortably lying on the sofa. As I entered she rose up with a bound, tossing her brown curly hair back, and then looking up at me with the brightest, bird-like looking eyes, said, —

"I suppose you are Mr. West."

I told her she was quite right in her supposition, and offered to shake hands. She did put her hand in mine, but looking up at me all the time with such quizzical, daring eyes, that I felt impertinence was a family failing.

"You've come from the country, Nelly tells me," I said condescendingly. I had to look such a long way down before I could discover this small young lady, that I felt condescending.

"Yes; I was governess to the Henleys, in Hertfordshire; but I wasn't old enough, or grave enough, or something. So — so I've come back again."

That imp a governess! I was silent, thinking what strange people I had dropped among, and wondering why Agnes and Emily didn't exert themselves to earn something, instead of risking that morsel of a creature on the wide world.

"I know what you are thinking," she exclaimed, suddenly throwing herself into her former position on the sofa. "Well, I will tell you why I went out as a governess. You see papa did not wish any of us to go away from home; but when we grew poor, Edith got so disagreeable that she and I were always quarrelling. Well, papa said he would not live in the same house with us, so Edith wanted to go out; but you see she's such a drudging, housekeeping, economical person — quite the useful, while I am only the ornamental — so the day went against me. But, here I am back again, like a bad shilling."

I was not surprised to hear the two sisters quarrelled. To compare even their persons

Edith tall, dignified; Georgy, tiny, saucy-looking, for all the world just like a little worrying gnat, was sufficient to tell you there could not be much harmony between the pair.

"One comfort is," added the young lady on the sofa, "if I've lost my situation, Edith's lost hers too; so she can't make much fuss about me."

As Georgy spoke Edith entered the room, all trace of the house-maid having disappeared.

She smiled contemptuously as she saw how close to her sister I was sitting, and I was fool enough to get up at once.

At tea, Georgy kept up her reputation for noise and gayety. She quizzed and imitated every member of the family she had just quitted; she uttered the most absurd nonsense, and kept us all laughing in spite of ourselves. I could see the father scarcely approved of such wild ways before me, and Edith looked annoyed; but the young lady seemed to care very little about either of them, and went on talking and laughing, quite content to be the centre of attraction.

As we were sitting there the servant girl

came up to tell me a gentleman wanted to speak to me. She always announced my friends in that style. I rose — I confess rather reluctantly, for I was very comfortably ensconced in a corner of the sofa, and had only just received my second cup from Edith's hand.

Georgy exclaimed, "Well, then, show him up." Then, turning to Edith, she added, "I can't say, my dear Edith, Ann's manners repay all the pains you have bestowed on her."

"I wish you would have the kindness to mind your own business, and not give orders here," Edith answered, fiercely. "Mr. West's friends are not our friends."

As she spoke, Smith walked in. Now this was just what my "convenient" friend had often desired; but I, fond as I was of him, did not consider him exactly the man to be introduced into such a family. As I said before, Smith was a clever man, with expensive habits, pleasant manners, and empty pockets. I always believed him to be the soul of honor, so far, of course, as his notions of honor extended.

To come and pour out all his fascinations

as homage at the feet of a poor, pretty girl, and then, when he had won her affections, but was himself getting a little — a little — why, a fellow should not go *too* far, you know — certainly stood within the limits of his notion.

The idea of a poor man marrying a poor girl never entered his head as within the limits of the tangible. He even went so far as to think it impossible for even a young girl to entertain such an idea. "Sentiment, my dear West," he would say to me, "is insanity everywhere but in books."

There was no help for it; my conscience was free, at any rate; and anyhow there stood Smith in the doorway, bowing in a very agreeable manner. I must go forward and introduce him.

Mr. Bush was very gracious; all the daughters, too, except Edith, looked rather pleased than otherwise. That impish little Georgy's influence had already begun to tell.

"May I offer you a cup of tea?" Edith said, coldly, and Smith accepted, very much to her annoyance, for there was none left, and she was obliged to make more. After he had taken it she retired to the back room, and

occupied herself in some mysterious manner. It was not with work or reading, nor exactly writing.

Meanwhile Georgy, in the front room, was perfect queen, and divided her gracious attention pretty equally between Smith and myself.

Suddenly Smith noticed the piano, and exclaimed, "Ah — a piano! Now, Miss Georgy, I'm sure you play.

"Hush! I should have to ask permission, and at that my pride revolts," replied the young lady, with a shake of her small person.

"Tell me of whom to ask it, and I will, with the greatest pleasure."

Georgy pointed over her shoulder into the back room, with a little toss of her head.

"There," she whispered; "but don't say I am going to play."

Smith laughed, and went up to Edith, and returned in an instant dangling a bunch of keys; and then Georgy sat down to the piano and jingled through a few waltzes and polkas, very much to her own satisfaction, if not to that of her hearers.

Smith pretended immense delight, and he was in the midst of some flowery compliments when Ann opened the door, and in walked Mr. Grainger.

I happened to look at Edith as Agnes rose and said, "Ah, Mr. Grainger, how do you do?"

If ever disgust disfigured a woman's face, it did hers at that moment; still she came forward in another minute, smiling as if delighted to see him. I watched her closely that evening: I was anxious to understand the part she was playing; but she seemed so natural, that if it was a part she acted in encouraging the evident attentions of Mr. Grainger, it was performed to perfection.

* * * *

Another month passed. Smith came constantly, and flirted with Georgy. I found it pleasant enough now, in spite of Edith. We were always well received by the gay, imp-like little Georgy. Emily and Agnes kept a kind of neutral ground, while Mr. Bush was very civil. So, for a time, I had the best of it.

I thought Edith seemed rather more contented, though she never gave us the least encouragement. She left us very much to ourselves, and rather avoided having any wordy war. She would pass me quickly on the stairs, even if she were in her untidiest

condition; and she even saw me once knock over a milk-jug, spilling the contents and breaking the jug, without making any offensive remark.

Georgy was very amusing, but distressingly lazy; and I began to distinguish between the refinement that preferred disorder to the shockingness of doing dirty work, and the refinement that, rather than exist amidst confusion, thought nothing of dirtying her hands terribly and washing them again. It was very agreeable to find Georgy always dressed in those tasty muslins, looking fresh and ladylike, with her white hands, and filbert nails, and glossy curls, giving one just an idea of perfume when she passed; but then to be received in a close, dusty, untidy room, to find the tea late when you came home tired, and the water smoky, and the things in your room unarranged, and everything at sixes and sevens — as it was once when Edith suddenly disappeared for a week from H—— Terrace, and Georgy took the head of affairs — rather disgusted me with the first kind of refinement.

The young person seemed in much better humor when she reappeared — she was even civil; but she never mentioned where she had

been, or for what; and I don't think even Georgy knew, or she would have told us. Georgy was very communicative, but we could never discover from her why Edith disliked me so. She said she supposed it was natural disagreeableness, and advised us to act on the offensive. She said it was the only way with Edith: if you didn't bully her, why she would you — it was her nature. She had been born a tyrant, and she supposed she would die one; but, at any rate, she should never tyrannize over her, Georgy Bush.

CHAPTER VI.

THE PROPOSED PARTY AT NO. 3, AND WHAT EDITH THOUGHT OF IT.

WHILE Edith was away, Georgy had been trying to work up her sisters to the giving of a small party. Quiet home life didn't at all suit this restless, vain little being, and I think she was even beginning to weary of Smith's constant attentions, and pine after a greater number of admirers.

Georgy was rather an expensive game to Smith. He bought her music, which she couldn't play, but which she said she was dying for; books, which she never read, but which she liked to display to admiring sisters; flowers from Covent Garden, which she allowed to lie about till Edith came with orderly hands to their succor; and latterly I noticed lockets, and bracelets, and brooches constantly varying about the small decked-out person of Miss Georgy.

I couldn't for a moment imagine Smith was in love; I knew his principles too well, still he seemed to be going rather far this time for a man of his age. Smith was over thirty.

I came home about four o'clock one Saturday. As I stood in the hall hanging up my coat, I could see Edith standing by the mantel-shelf in the parlor examining a paper. There was a look of trouble about her face quite painful, and I thought to myself, "Strange that all the anxiety of the family should be shifted on to the shoulders of this girl!" Agnes was in the room with her, but she seemed to play no active part.

"I must pay it at once," I heard Edith say. "It won't do to let papa see it, with that worry about the bill on the 1st hanging over him. I think I ought to pay it, don't you, Agnes?"

"You know best, dear. It seems dreadfully hard though."

I saw her go to her desk and take out a cheque-book; then she stooped, tore out a leaf, and filled it up, saying to Agnes, "When Willie comes in send him at once. If these taxes and rates pour in, and papa's affairs don't turn a little, my poor hoard will soon dwindle."

She came out and we met. "Mr. Smith is up-stairs again," she said. Her tone implied annoyance, so I said, "I hope you don't hold me responsible for the follies of my friend."

"I am not so unjust," she answered, coldly. As she passed the drawing-room door, Emily called, "Oh, come in, Edith; you are just the person we want!"

"Yes," added Georgy, "do come and tell us, like a clever thing as you are, how we must manage our party."

"What party?"

"Oh! didn't you know? Ah! it was while you were away, papa gave us leave to have a party. A quiet one, of course, and Mr. Smith has promised to bring a quadrille friend or two; but we can't decide about the supper."

Edith stood for an instant silent, looking with her scornful eyes full in her sister's face.

"Are you mad, Georgy? You know such a thing is impossible."

"When you have talked with us a little, Edith, you will see that, on the contrary, it is very possible," Georgy said, in her gentlest tone.

"I tell you it can't be, it mustn't be," the other replied; and she turned to walk away, but the worrying little gnat buzzed round her and intercepted her.

"Now just listen, Miss Edith; you shan't tyrannize over us all. We will have a little reasonable pleasure. Agnes wishes it, Emily, Nelly, Mr. West, Mr. Smith, all of us wish it, all but you, and you shan't spoil all our happiness. I tell you I will have this party."

"You *will;* and where is the money to pay for it?" asked Edith, quietly, but her eyes glowing with passion.

"Papa has it," said Georgy, undauntedly.

"You talk like a child, and like a child you must be treated. I tell you again it cannot be."

"It wouldn't be a great expense, Edith," put in Emily, "would it, Agnes?" for Agnes had come in quietly during the discussion.

"I think not. Do be obliging, Edith."

"Indeed, Miss Edith, we are six to one; you must give in;" Smith laughed. "West and I will supply the champagne and do our share."

She gave him a look of utter contempt, then she turned to her sisters.

"I do not speak of Georgy," she said, in a voice almost breathless with passion, "but I thought you others had some sense of honor in you."

"You are unreasonable," said Emily.

"You are ridiculous," said Georgy. "We don't depend on you for our bread, why should we bend and obey you?"

"Be silent, I tell you; don't *you* speak to me," answered Edith. "Agnes, Emily, have I ever taunted you with such a thing? Listen now, once and for all. You know what I can do if I choose. Shall I unloose Mr. Grainger among you? Now have the party if you dare."

She spoke with the calmness of intense passion, and then walked out of the room and went up stairs.

We were all silent for a moment. I don't think any of the sisters but Agnes understood the threat, and she turned dreadfully pale. Georgy recovered first. "I don't believe a word about it," she exclaimed, "and we will dare her and have the party."

But no one seconded the motion, and we all felt very uncomfortable in consequence of that outburst of the young person's temper.

Georgy was horribly sulky, so Smith, to cheer her up, proposed going to the Opera, for a box at which, he said, he had an order; but which he had not offered before because it was not a very good piece that night, but, under the circumstances, he thought it would be better to put up with that and take themselves off.

I knew differently. The truth was Smith had just learnt that Mr. Bush had gone to Paris for a week, leaving an elderly female cousin in nominal charge, who, as Georgy said, "wouldn't be at all tiresome about anything."

Agnes shook her head and left the room; she was too lazy to enter into a struggle with that worrying little imp; besides, as she said, "Though Georgy was small she was only two years younger than herself, and might direct her own actions." Emily needed little persuasion to follow where her volatile sister led, so we soon agreed and made our plans.

As we sat talking and gradually recovering our spirits, the door opened and Edith came in. She was deadly pale; even her lips were white.

"I have come to say," she said, in a firm

but rather low voice, looking at Smith and me, "that I regret very much having said what I did in your presence. May I trust to your gentlemanly honor not to repeat it?"

"Most certainly," we both exclaimed, rising from our seats with as much respect as if a queen had stood before us.

There is something so wonderfully powerful in a woman's dignity. Smith held out his hand. "If I annoyed you, forgive me, Miss Bush; on my honor it was unintentionally."

She looked up at him for an instant, and I saw the tears rush, clouding her eyes. Her lips moved to speak, but no words came, and she went swiftly out of the room.

"She didn't say a word, Lewis," Smith told me afterwards, when we talked the scene over, "but she gave my hand a clasp, just as one fellow would have another's. There's no humbug about that girl at any rate."

I envied Smith his talent for grappling with opportunity. I might have ended my warfare with Edith at once, I felt, if I had only acted the part he did, but it never entered my head. On the contrary, I dreaded adding to the scene. I could have asked her to play on the piano, sing a song, anything to divert

her thoughts; and I'm sure those tears of hers affected me quite as much as they did Smith, and I should never have forgiven myself if any word of mine had been the cause of them; and yet — there, I dare say she was considering him a manly, honest fellow, and me a poor, proud, cold fool.

Well, I was vexed, but I couldn't help it.

We went to the Opera, and did not return till nearly twelve o'clock. We heard a magnificent voice singing as we entered, a voice that thrilled through the house.

When we went into the drawing-room we found Edith at the piano, Grainger beside her, and on the sofa, to my utter surprise, sat Wells, playing a game of dominoes with Nelly.

Edith continued her song without noticing our entrance, and, after quietly greeting Wells, we all sat down and listened.

We had just come from the Opera, but I doubt if there was one of us (of course Georgy excepted) who felt that voice inferior to those we had just heard. It might want the artistic finish, but for richness of tone and sweetness, certainly it could bear comparison.

As she ended, Grainger came forward to salute me, and Smith went to Edith.

"Indeed, Miss Edith, you hide your candle under a bushel most scrupulously. I have frequented this house for nearly two months and I had no idea you sang."

"And yet I practise every day," she answered, smiling. She spoke gently, but seemed weary and unwilling to talk, so Smith let her pass, and went back to Georgy, who, by the way, was pouting at his speaking to the enemy; and Edith crossed the room and went and sat down by Nelly, and there stayed with her arm thrown lovingly round the poor blind child that she might direct her hand in the game.

It was just like Wells's kind-heartedness, to pass his evenings playing dominoes and talking childish nonsense to Nelly.

"'There was a look of trouble about her face quite painful, and I thought to myself, 'Strange that all the anxiety of the family should be shifted on to the shoulders of this girl!'"—*See page* 65.

CHAPTER VII.

WE MAKE A GUESS AT EDITH'S SECRET.

AFTER that rather stiff scuffle on Saturday, I felt it would be better to prevent Smith's coming to the house on Sunday, especially as Mr. Bush was absent.

I had a great idea of the young person's spirit, and I thought she was quite capable of making her father settle matters summarily when he returned; and there was something about the grave, respectable papa which looked as if he could be roused terribly on occasions.

Now I hate scenes; so directly after breakfast on Sunday morning I drove to Smith's lodgings and persuaded him to go and dine with me at Wells's place, which is about four miles from Richmond.

As I said before, Wells is a quiet kind of fellow, with a wholesome fancy for sticking

to the rules his mother taught him — going to church once at least on Sunday, giving money to schools, not playing cards, or drinking spirits, and with a kind of horror of tobacco.

Still he is a clever fellow too. I often fancy he has more real book knowledge than Smith; and that his is more softness of heart than head.

He always goes and spends Sunday in the country with his aunt. This aunt, I must observe, has nothing to do with the property — that all belongs to Wells, who is an orphan, and we have a general invitation to spend Sunday with him.

Smith agreed rather reluctantly. I don't know if the imp really had succeeded in fascinating him, but he certainly spent more time in the female society at H—— Terrace than I had ever known him to do in any other.

We had dinner rather early, and then, as the evening was warm and fine, took our wine and cigars to an arbor that overlooked the river as it wound on its shiny, placid way from Richmond.

Smith drank and smoked a great deal, then he launched out into his usual wit and humor, and gave Wells and I little trouble in regard

to conversation. I think it is our untalkative natures that make us such suitable companions for Smith. However, on that night, on the first opportunity, Wells began to speak of the Bushes.

"However did you get to know Grainger?" I asked. Wells flushed slightly.

"To tell you the truth," he exclaimed, "not under the most agreeable circumstances, and I was very sorry to find him on terms of such intimacy at your friends the Bushes. If you had not come to-day I should have gone to you — I wanted so much to tell you all about it. We were passing the evening together (for I had my reasons for keeping friendly with him) when we happened to speak of singing, and he said he knew a lady whose voice, in his estimation, equalled that of any public singer he had heard, and he offered to introduce me to her. He said he was on terms of sufficient intimacy to take me to her house then and there if I chose. I accepted, and you know you found me there."

"But what connection can he have with the family? that he has some is very evident," I exclaimed.

"He told me the father was his debtor for

£300, and he said, if it were not for the daughter, he would be down on him to-morrow. You should have seen the fiendish look of the fellow as he spoke: he would do as he said, I am sure."

Smith gave a low whistle.

"Do you remember Edith's words yesterday, Lewis?"

Of course I did, and I understood now a good many things that had been mysterious before. The little hoard she had mentioned, that look of disgust when Grainger entered, and her change of manner in his presence, the economy, the hard working. I understood that now. Was she acting a strictly honorable part?

"He told me," continued Wells, "he could arrest the father any day; he called him a sneaking rascal, an old thief; but to be abused by Mr. Grainger I thought no dishonor."

"And do you really mean to say that Edith is engaged to him?" said I slowly, after a pause.

"He didn't say that; he only implied that ultimately she would be his wife. What surprised me was that such a fellow, such a sneaking, cowardly, money-loving wretch

should ever have fallen in love with such a girl. Certainly he is a proud fellow, and he knows the Bushes are of good family, while he — he was the natural son of a pawnbroker."

Both Smith and I started. These are not the times of chivalry, for knights to ride about succoring distressed ladies and others who require help, and we neither of us felt inclined to be Quixotic; but when Wells said, "I wish we could do something," we both heartily echoed the wish.

"Of course," added he, "I tell you this in confidence: I can assure you if you knew Grainger — the gambling, drinking blackguard! — as I do, you would feel it almost a Christian duty to warn Edith Bush against him."

Warn her! Poor girl, that disgustful look I remembered so well, showed she required no warning.

We talked on for some time, deploring very much poor Edith's position, and arguing whether it was honorable or not. I must confess that though we were men, and of course in the general way condemn a woman trifling with a man's feeling, we acquitted

Edith and extolled her conduct. I am sure Wells considered it heroism: Smith said it was more fit for a novel than real life — and I, I thought — alas! for poor human nature — poor, degraded human nature, some call it. I wish they would show us how and why it is degraded.

Smith said it wasn't degraded: he called it our natural condition, and talked about man's own institutions as the causes of misery. But he never mentioned Adam and Eve, and he always does talk such free, utter nonsense on such matters, particularly after he has been sitting with a cigar and a bottle of wine for an hour after dinner.

I don't know what Georgy would have said to hear him talk, and especially to have heard no mention of her in his conversation.

When we returned to H —— Terrace, I found Grainger sitting up in the drawing-room, but Edith was not there. She had not yet come from church. I don't know whether Grainger was afraid of our being so constantly in the company of his lady-love, or not, but he was unusually savage and disagreeable.

In vain Georgy tried her fascination; he

refused all conversation, but sat doggedly waiting Edith's arrival.

When she entered, she came up to him with a bright, smiling countenance, looking very handsome; but he received her sulkily, and sat on the sofa looking as dogged and savage as ever. Suddenly he started up and exclaimed —

"Will you go to the Popular Concert to-morrow, Edith?"

She looked up at him in a half-surprised, half-indignant manner.

"You know, Mr. Grainger," she answered, quickly, "I have always declined going anywhere in public without my father; you know it is a principle with me."

He looked very angry, but he was silent. A few minutes afterwards he said to me —

"I find, Mr. West, that Wells is an intimate friend of yours."

"Very intimate, I replied; "I knew him first at Oxford, and we have been great friends ever since then; indeed I have just come from his place, where Smith and I have been dining; he mentioned to me his acquaintance with you."

"Acquaintance! why does he call himself a mere acquaintance? does he think I should have brought a mere acquaintance here last night, and told him what I did?"

Edith looked round uneasily, and I saw almost a smile pass over Grainger's face as he caught her eye.

"Well," he added, rising, evidently having shot the arrow he wished, and seen it strike, "it's getting late. I hope to have the pleasure of seeing you to-morrow, or, at furthest, the next day," he said, turning to Edith. "Good night."

She shook hands with him in her usual manner, and went as far as the head of the stairs with him.

Can she mean to marry him, or is she an excellent actress? thought I.

She did not re-enter the drawing-room, but went up stairs into the little room.

The next morning, when she came down to breakfast, her face was very pale, and her eyes had the dark, heavy look of one who had not slept. She left the breakfast table before any of us, saying, "If I am not at home by six, don't wait."

As she spoke, the postman came to the door and brought her a letter. Her face brightened as she read, afterwards she threw it to Agnes, merely saying, "Private," and went out.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE PARTY.

AFTER his first introduction by Grainger, Wells came to H—— Terrace almost as often as Smith. We were on those terms now with Mr. Bush and his family that, in spite of the young person, the lodger and his friends were no longer a distinct set.

Edith, however, never countenanced us; perhaps she was afraid of angering Mr. Grainger.

That gentleman soon declared open war with us, and avoided us on all occasions, very much to our, and I think also to Edith's, satisfaction. If we did chance to meet, his cold and sarcastic remarks clearly showed us he objected to our intimacy at No. 3 quite as much as the young person did.

We saw very little of Edith; she was out a great deal, and in the evening she passed most of her time up-stairs. One day Smith

asked Georgy what her sister did all alone in that little room, and Georgy said, 'Oh, she was doing something about music—composing, or copying out, or something.'

The imp thoroughly hated Edith. I have never seen before two sisters such bitter enemies.

One day the little traitress came smiling into the drawing-room, where Smith, Wells, and I were.

"Mr. West," she exclaimed, "I have discovered why Edith hates your being here so. I heard her talking to Agnes about it just now. It is because she doesn't like you to see the part she is playing with Grainger. She says men see through those things so quickly, and it's degrading enough to have to do it, without having witnesses to it. She was in a passion, and said it was too bad of papa to subject her to such humiliation. Agnes offered to speak to papa, but at the bare idea, she cooled down, and got humble and resigned."

"Are you sure of what you say, Georgy?" I asked gravely.

"Quite. Come down into the back parlor and hear for yourself — they are talking still,"

answered this obliging young lady. "Isn't Edith a hypocrite to be playing in this way with Grainger?" she added. Wells answered quickly for me, but gravely and kindly —

"No, Miss Georgy, all things considered, I cannot call your sister a hypocrite. By your own, or rather, her own words, she shows you what a humiliation she undergoes. Besides, before you judge an action, learn its motive, Miss Georgy."

We were standing about the window with our backs to the room. As Wells finished speaking, I turned away, and then I saw Edith standing in the back room. I don't know if she had only just entered, or if she had overheard our conversation. She was rather flushed, but she came up to us with perfect composure, and spoke a little about a new piece of music she held in her hand, and then went out.

"Did she hear?" asked Georgy, looking really frightened.

"I trust she did," said Wells, gravely. "I would not have betrayed you, Miss Bush, but it is only right your sister should know who is the Judas of the family." As for Smith he got up without a word and left the house.

"Go, all of you," said Agnes in a quick, authoritative voice; "go, Georgina: it would kill her to find you here when she recovers."—*See page* 100.

Georgy thought fit to throw herself on the sofa, and burst into tears. "Are they genuine?" I whispered to Wells, and he shrugged his shoulders.

In about half an hour Edith reappeared to beg Wells to come up and see Nelly, who had hurt her foot, and couldn't walk. So Wells went up into that mysterious little room, and it was the first, but not the last time he spent his afternoon up there with Edith and Nelly.

For about a week after this incident, things seemed to go on more smoothly again. Georgy was frightened, I suppose, at having gone rather too far, or perhaps it was Smith who kept her in order; at any rate she avoided any direct outbreak with Edith, and on the whole behaved peaceably.

Suddenly Edith set off on one of her mysterious visits, and then Georgy triumphed again, and brought matters to a climax, though in a way she certainly never expected.

Of course directly Edith was safely out of the way, the party question was again brought forward, Mr. Bush's consent obtained, and everything settled to everybody's satisfaction.

I confess once I felt a certain qualm of conscience, as if I were being guilty of a mean-

ness, and even traitorship to the young person, when I allowed myself to be talked over by that dreadful little Georgy into inviting some of my friends, and ordering a dozen of champagne for supper. Still, after all, I had never set up for Edith's ally; on the contrary, we were almost declared enemies. As to Smith,—of course I know I have no business with Smith's sins or shortcomings,—still I do think Smith ought to have been ashamed of himself. I remembered that manly way in which he had begged Edith's pardon and shaken hands with her—when she was so angry with us all on this very subject—if he didn't. Why, such a clasp of the hand would have bound me over to keep the peace for life! And here it was scarcely three weeks, and he had forgotten all about it, and was again a complete slave in the iron little hands of Miss Georgy.

Wells knew nothing about the scene the Miss Bushes had acted a little while ago to Smith and myself, so he joined innocently enough in our arrangements.

Well! the house gradually fell into confusion: it had begun that process ever since Edith's departure, but as the important

Thursday drew nigh, it grew worse and worse. Why all this fuss was necessary I never could understand, but it certainly was very unpleasant, and I began to regret, for my own sake, that I had ever agreed to the giving of a party.

On Thursday evening I went home rather later than usual, according to Georgy's request. I found the parlor turned into a tea-room, whose presiding genius was Emily, in a very low dress, and with pink roses in her hair.

The drawing-room, in all the glory of uncovered chairs and sofas, was brilliantly lighted, not only by the gaselier, but by sundry lamps and candles distributed about the room, while there was an attempt at flower decoration, and about the windows a queer festooning of pink calico and white muslin.

Agnes was wandering about dressed very soberly in muslin, with only the plaits of her beautiful shining hair for head-dress.

"Georgy insists upon the flowers and pink calico, Mr. West," she said, as I entered. "Don't you think they look rather ridiculous?"

Truth to tell I did; but I was too cowardly

to dispute Miss Georgy's taste; so, saying "Oh, no," I ran up stairs to dress.

When I came down, there were a good many people in the drawing-room, and, as Willie whispered to me, the party had begun. I don't shine in such scenes—I hate them—so I stole quietly into a back corner, to watch at my ease how things went on. The company was rather mixed; but on the whole I was satisfied by their connections that the Bushes belonged to the higher portion of the middle class.

Some of the gentlemen were rather young, and a little *gauche*, giving me the idea that Willie had been recruiting among his City acquaintance; and some of the ladies seemed a little strange with the Misses Bush; but those who gathered familiarly round Mr. Bush were all of the higher class, and I noticed they treated the old gentleman with a kind of sympathizing respect, while he unbent from his usual severe gravity, and seemed almost cheerful. Agnes played hostess most gracefully, and Georgy, dressed in a perfect maze of flounces, flowers, ribbons, and lace, fluttered about among the company, spreading laughter and gayety wherever she went.

Smith and Wells appeared about ten o'clock, and Smith came up to me immediately. "How is it going off, Lewis?" he whispered. "Anything extraordinary happened yet?"

"Nothing — everything all right," I replied; at which Smith seemed greatly relieved.

"I've asked the Harvey people and Muffs," he said, "and you know what quizzes they are."

Just then Georgy came up. "Are you going to dance with me, Mr. Smith?"

Of course he was, and so off they went.

I couldn't understand Smith's anxiety that all should go on well. What was it to him, or to me, or to any other man, excepting Mr. Bush?

As I said before, I never play an active part in scenes like these. In vain Agnes, who feared I was being neglected, besought me to dance; in vain Georgy tried to beguile me. I was proof even against her attractions, though she offered to give up a waltz with Smith, if I liked, and honor me. I preferred sitting in my odd corner, watching the girls' faces as they smiled and glowed in the

dance, and watching the awkward attempts of the city youths at playing the agreeable. I liked to listen to the hum of talk amidst the gay music, and to catch snatches of flirting conversation as the couples passed me; and, best of all, I liked to watch that gay little Georgy whizzing about with her fluttering flounces, now here, now there, laughing, talking, flirting with all. It was even an amusement to look at poor Smith — Smith, usually the gayest, the most courted, to-night looking so annoyed. Could it be the impossibility of keeping that little imp near him, as usual? I had never yet seen Smith reduced to the degree of "spooniness" that entails jealousy, and I could not believe it possible.

However, I saw him looking much brighter a few minutes after, when he was flying round the room with Georgy in his arms; yes, absolutely in his arms, for Smith was tall and the imp very short. I doubt if Georgy's toe touched the floor.

I sat there, and moralized upon human nature in general, and on Smiths and imps as a class, and I felt supremely superior.

As I was just rousing myself to follow the general move to the supper-room, I felt a

light hand on my arm, and Nelly said, "Will you take me down, Mr. West?" I had not noticed the poor blind child all the evening, and my conscience reproached me, so I paid her all my attention during supper, and never spoke to another soul; and afterwards I took her up-stairs carefully, and we sat together in my corner. Wells joined us, and there we remained, while the dancing went on all the merrier for the champagne.

It was about twelve o'clock. The gayety was at its height; the Lancers were being danced with the usual amount of clatter and laughter, when, from our corner we saw a tall figure come down stairs, and Edith, dressed in a low evening dress, with a white rose in her dark hair, came slowly, and with stately grace into the room. Her face was pale as the rose she wore, and the dark, stern glitter of her eyes, and slight frown on her brow, spoke ominously of the brewing storm.

She went up to her father, and spoke a few words. He seemed surprised to see her, but she evidently hushed his exclamations. She had come in so quietly amid the dancers that she was unobserved, and she stood for an instant, looking calmly round; then she

caught sight of us and came up. "Nelly, dear," she said. The blind girl started. "You here! when did you come back?" she exclaimed. Then she added in a low, sad voice, "I feared it would happen like this, Don't be very angry, Edith." She took her sister's hand caressingly in hers, and held it as I and Wells spoke.

I said very little, for I felt almost guilty; but Wells, who knew nothing, talked unrestrainedly. As Edith stood beside us, Smith and Georgy came sauntering by. Georgy was talking, but I heard Smith suddenly interrupt her with —

"Good heavens, Georgiana! there's your sister."

Edith turned and faced them. I shall never forget the look of utter consternation with which Georgy gazed up at her tall, stately sister. For an instant she blushed and hesitated; then, as if remembering herself, she tossed back her head, laughed a little, impertinent laugh, and drew Smith on.

"The storm won't burst yet," she said; "but when it does it will be something tremendous."

But the storm that did burst was not what he expected.

When Edith entered the drawing-room I don't believe she ever intended to act as she did. Her character and former conduct, threatening and passionate as it undoubtedly was, supported my assertion that the fault she committed was unpremeditated, and so saved from meanness. Georgy had scarcely passed, leaving Edith quivering inwardly with passion, when Mr. Grainger came up with his usual confident smile and familiar salutations. Edith's reply was, for the first time, sharp; for the first time she unveiled her dislike and disgust for him. He tried conversation, but her answers were short, her manner cold and repelling; and Grainger, from being astonished, grew sulky, and finally walked off. Nelly's fingers wound caressingly round her sister's, but she withdrew them, and walked into the back room. I felt almost alarmed; I knew the game that Edith had been playing. Was she, in a moment of temper or revenge, going to throw it up, and leave Fate to do her worst? Wells looked at me uneasily; presently he rose, saying, —

"Let us go into the back room, Lewis."

He drew Nelly's arm within his, and we all three pushed our way through the dancers. Agnes met us.

"Is it not unfortunate?" she whispered. "Oh, Mr. West, how I wish I had not yielded to Georgy!"

Mr. Grainger was in the back room, standing sulkily by the piano. Edith sat on the sofa, at a distance, and we went and joined her. I was quite glad when at last I saw people beginning to depart. I hoped Grainger would follow their example, and leave things as they were till the next day; I dreaded his seeking any more conversation with her that night, for by her glittering eyes I could read that the storm had not yet burst.

But there he stood, looking as dogged as she, every now and then casting angry glances at our group. It must come to-night, whatever it was.

The dancers in the front room grew fewer and fewer, and at length the only persons remaining besides the family, were Grainger, Smith, Wells and myself.

Edith rose slowly, as if she meant to slip off quietly; but she had not moved six steps before Grainger followed her.

"May I claim your attention for a few minutes?" he said, in a low voice; but as I sat near, I could hear every word. "Will

you tell me how I have incurred your displeasure?" he said, formally.

"In no way," she answered coldly. "I am not displeased with you."

"Then why did you treat me just now as if I had most deeply offended you?"

He spoke in the haughtiest tone, almost commandingly. No wonder Edith's eyes lightened as she answered, —

"And by what right do you question me in this manner?"

"By what right?" He laughed a cold, insulting laugh, as he repeated her words, and looked daringly into her face. She returned his look with all the furies gleaming in her eyes, and then turning round with a swift movement, went out and shut the door almost in his face. So ended the party.

Georgy had dared Edith, and Edith had fulfilled her threat, and let Mr. Grainger loose among them. And for all this, the poor father, was he to be the victim? I could not believe it; Edith was too good, too noble for that. She was only frightening them; she must have some means at hand to prevent such a catastrophe.

"I shall come to-morrow," said Wells to me as we parted. "I can't let her fight it out alone with that fellow."

Smith said nothing, but he looked very perplexed.

"Edith turned and faced them. I shall never forget the look of utter consternation with which Georgy gazed up at her tall, stately sister."—*See page* 92.

CHAPTER IX.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE PARTY.

BREAKFAST was late the next morning. Only Emily, Edith, and Mr. Bush were at table. Emily's eyes were red and swollen with crying, but Edith was only deadly pale.

Mr. Bush endeavored to talk a little, but I was too uneasy myself to follow up any conversation, so he gave up the attempt, and we ate our breakfast in grim silence.

Just as I was leaving the table, the servant brought in a note for Mr. Bush, who read it, and then passed it, without a word, to Edith.

I went into the next room for my hat, and then I heard Mr. Bush say, despairingly, —

"What can I do? what shall I do? To be hunted and persecuted" —

Then Edith's voice interrupted: "Hush, papa, dear! only trust to me! only trust to me!" and then some one rushed up-stairs.

I put on my hat and went off, not to business, but to Wells's, and then with him to Smith's. We talked matters over, and Wells proposed to come back, and speak out boldly to Edith, and beg her to tell us truthfully, how matters stood, so that we might interpose, and take the affair in our own hands.

When we arrived at H—— Terrace we found everything quiet. Georgy was sitting in the parlor knitting; Agnes was reading, and Edith writing. There was something so calm and dignified about the two elder sisters that I thought to myself, if Wells dared to ask Miss Edith to take him into her confidence, and tell him freely her own private affairs, it was certainly a bolder thing than I dared do.

Wells didn't dare it either; so we sat talking on the weather, and the party, and all kinds of subjects, when a double knock came, and in a few minutes Ann entered, and said, —

"Mr. Grainger would be glad to speak to Miss Edith." Edith closed and locked her desk immediately, and left the room.

We felt we were in the way; we felt that even Georgy would have given worlds to see us take our hats and depart, and yet we could

not go. For my own part, I felt I must see Edith when she came away from her interview.

This silent kind of misery was dreadful.

After a time, Agnes gave up all attempt to entertain us, but lay back in the arm-chair with her hands pressed to her temples, listening earnestly, I thought, for the slightest sound overhead. Even Georgy seemed too frightened to speak.

Half an hour must have passed; then the drawing-room door opened and two persons came down stairs. Edith's voice said cheerfully, "At seven, if you like." And Grainger answered, "Very well, then, let it be seven; no fear of my not being punctual. Good-by."

Agnes started up, and Edith came in. I looked at her face; her cheeks were flushed, and her eyes shone feverishly. She came and stood by Agnes.

"We've made up our quàrrel, you see," she said, with an attempt at gayety; "I was horribly cross last night; no wonder the poor man was offended."

Suddenly the color faded from her face, she put up her hands to her head, and dropped, fainting, at her sister's feet.

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"Go, all of you," said Agnes, in a quick, authoritative voice; "go, Georgiana; it would kill her to find you here when she recovers."

That evening as Smith and I sat smoking in Wells's room, Smith's servant brought him a small mauve-colored note, smelling most deliciously of wood violets. Smith read it and consigned it to his pocket-book amidst our congratulations.

"Now confess," I said, "is not that note from No. 3? and confess it is not the first, or second, or sixth of its kind and color."

"Don't be impertinent, Lewis," answered Smith; "but do you know it contains the news we all feared?"

"What!" I exclaimed; "the father is not arrested?"

"No; but Edith is going to marry Grainger; in a fortnight, too."

Wells made no remark, but I saw him compress his lips firmly.

That was the only regular notice we had of Edith's engagement; but, in the constant visits of Grainger at all hours, in the busy preparation of dresses, &c., and in the grave, sad looks of Agnes and Edith we read daily of the coming event.

Gradually it became the talk of the family, and we joined in our remarks as if we had known it as long as themselves.

Edith, however, kept studiously out of our way. I never saw her except at meals, and then I noticed that she was daily growing thinner and paler. Our warfare had ceased entirely. If she spoke to me it was with the courteous indifference with which she would have addressed a perfect stranger; and if she ever met me on the stairs in any of her peculiar appearances, she never paused to make any annoying remark, but passed on as if too absorbed in her own affairs to have a thought for me.

On Sunday evening — the wedding was fixed for Thursday — Wells and I went to No. 3 rather earlier than usual. We had not been able to find Smith, but were not surprised on Edith telling us Agnes and Georgy were walking in Kensington Gardens.

Wells had come with me to examine a plan I had been drawing of some projected church, and we two busied ourselves at the table while Edith stood at the window.

She was dressed for walking, and evidently waiting for Mr. Grainger. We both watched

her a little as we studied the plan; for Edith was an object of interest to us, more particularly now that she so studiously avoided us.

She seemed scarcely conscious of our presence, certainly not of our regards, as she stood with her grave face turned half towards us, her thoughts evidently busily and sadly engaged, to judge by the changing expression of her usually quiet countenance.

Wells made some rather queer remarks on my plan, and repeated the same things two and three times over; so feeling disgusted, I rolled up the paper and went to put it back in my desk. Was Wells going to do the same by Edith, Smith was doing by Georgy? You see, I don't attempt to give it a name; these things are incomprehensible to me, only I, myself, felt very much inclined to go up to the tall figure at the window and—. I happened to turn round; Wells *had* gone up to the tall figure at the window, and — why, he was only talking to her about the — sunset, I think. I felt relieved. Why should not I go too? Wells looked a little grim at my approach, but Edith looked just the same, neither graver or gayer, so I didn't mind Wells. I caught a reflection of all three of us in the

glass as we stood together. I saw a tall man, broad-shouldered, and with a great deal of whiskers, &c., standing a full head taller than the grave, handsome lady, and beside them, why, a mere boy, with a face like a statue, but with the resolution of a hero on it. I turned away.

"Have you been out this evening?" Wells asked.

"Not yet; I am waiting for Mr. Grainger," Edith said out boldly.

"For Mr. Grainger! why, I saw him not long ago at Richmond, and he told me he intended staying all night.".

She turned and looked steadily in his face. "Strange he should not have written or sent to tell me," she muttered; then untying her bonnet and taking it off, she smiled scornfully, I suppose at her own thoughts.

Presently she said, "You seem to know Mr. Grainger very well;" she spoke unwillingly, and turned away so as to avoid Wells seeing her face.

He answered, "Yes," laconically.

I saw she hoped he would say more, but he stood silent, waiting for her to question, which she would not do. I walked away,

and sat down to leave them freer. I felt the boy had more power than the man.

"Miss Bush," Wells half whispered in his earnest voice, "may I ask you one question, and will you pardon its seeming impertinence?"

He paused, and she said, coldly, "Speak on."

Do you know the character, the former life, of the man you are going to marry?"

Wells spoke so earnestly, so kindly, it was cruel of her to answer as she did.

"So well, sir, that I require no further information on the subject."

I saw Wells's face flush; but he never flinched.

"Is it your wish — are you happy in the idea of your coming marriage?" he continued. "Edith, listen!" he caught her hand and held it as he spoke; "I ask you this out of no idle curiosity. Duty and every honorable feeling urge, force me to do it. Answer me truthfully, boldly, as you know you can, if you choose."

"Take your hand away, Mr. Wells," she said, in a stern voice, but so low I could scarcely hear it.

"Be angry if you choose," he answered, still clenching her hand, "but listen to me. When I have spoken, act as you will, I shall have done my duty. If you cast away the help Heaven sends you now, in the future, Edith — a future which I warn you will be as dark as the company of sin can make it — you must not dare accuse fate or Heaven of your misery. Remember, it's your own doing, your own sacrifice, not to filial love, to filial duty, but to pride."

"You cannot judge," she said, coldly; "you do not know my position."

"I know more than you think, more than you know yourself," he answered, sternly; "do as you please. I will not save you against your will. Mr. Grainger is a rich man."

I never heard Wells sneer before. I was glad to see that Edith flushed. She muttered something about his misunderstanding her, and then went out of the room, and Wells gave her a grand, stately bow as she passed.

For the next two days, Wells didn't come to the house, and I kept out of it as much as I could. It pained me beyond measure to see the gay preparation, to see all the girls laughing and joking over the wedding-cards and

favors — all but the bride elect. Besides, there was a great deal of confusion, worse than before the party — that ill-fated party which had brought all this to pass.

Well, time flies! The eve of the wedding-day came. The drawing-room was all fresh with lace curtains and flowers; in the dining-room, plate and glass (come from Heaven knows where) lay scattered about; and in every room something betokened the coming event.

Smith and I were now on very intimate terms with the family, so we were admitted to the party assembled round the drawing-room table, and allowed to assist in the composition of the announcement of the marriage to be inserted in the "Times," and in directing the envelopes with the cards.

"Mr. and Mrs. W. Grainger. There's many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip," I thought; "but —." I could not finish my thought, for at that instant Wells came in and we had to make a general move to give him room.

Edith was not with us. She and Wells had not met since Sunday, and I was surprised now that Wells should come. He was very

silent, and I noticed he would not touch a card or a favor.

We sat there till it grew dusk; then the dressmaker came, and the young ladies rushed down stairs, followed by Smith, who has the "brass" for anything. I went into the back room and threw myself on the sofa to await their return, and Wells followed.

We heard some one come into the room, and in the dusky light we could distinguish the figure of Edith, taller by half a head than any of her sisters.

She went up to the table and took up a card, looked at it for an instant, and then threw it down, and sitting down by the table, folded her arms upon it, and laid her head wearily on them, and there stayed quietly. Poor bride! Down stairs we heard the merry laughter of her sisters, and the shrill voice of Georgy exclaiming on the beauty of the bridal dresses.

A quarter of an hour passed — then Wells got up, and went to pass out of the door of the front room. Edith started.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, "Oh! Mr. Wells, is that you?"

She half rose from her chair, then dropped

down again wearily, and Wells came up to her.

"Did you call me?" he asked, quietly.

"I — I wished to thank you for — for —" Her voice trembled so, she could scarcely speak. I could hear her breathe even in the back room — she almost gasped. Then she suddenly sprang up: "Oh, Mr. Wells, is it too late?" she asked, in a low voice — "is it too late? Do help me — do save me — I am so wretched!"

I only just saw that Wells's hand was clasped in both hers, and then I crept out of the room. I do so hate scenes.

Half an hour after I heard Wells come rushing down stairs. I met him.

"Well?" I said.

"I will do my best," he answered. "I am fully justified in using all the power I have over him, but it will have to be lightning work. Good night."

I did not understand in the least what Wells meant, but I felt that the boy might be depended on.

"Wells had come with me to examine a plan I had been drawing of some projected church, and we two busied ourselves at the table while Edith stood at the window."—*See page* 101.

CHAPTER X.

IN WHICH EDITH BECOMES MRS. Trotthumbs.

THE next morning dawned gloriously fine. Every one was up early, and everybody but Mr. Bush and Agnes seemed in good spirits. Of course Edith did not appear.

The wedding was to take place at half-past eleven, and by half-past ten the company began to make their appearance. I had heard nothing of Wells; but a large bouquet had come from Mr. Grainger for the bride; and I began to wonder how the slip was to be made between the cup and Mr. Grainger's lip.

As I went down out of my room, dressed in my wedding garments, the door of that mysterious little room opened, and Edith wrapped in a large shawl, peeped out.

"Have you any news of Mr. Wells?" she asked, faintly.

"No. And you?"

"None — yet he promised so faithfully."

I did not know what to say.

"What time is it?"

"Half-past ten."

"Then I must give it up. He couldn't help it, I suppose."

I shall never forget her look of utter distress as she turned and shut the door.

In about half an hour she came down, in her white bridal dress and long floating veil. She looked stately, but not beautiful; her face was too pale, her eyes too heavy, and she had a dull, unconscious look, as if she were acting in her sleep; and only when her father appeared she struggled to smile and look contented, and then it was absolutely painful to look at her.

I went and sat near her. As I passed she started, and looked up at me with such a deep, wild, piteous glance, that I could not help pausing to whisper —

"There is still a quarter of an hour, and he said it would have to be "lightning" work."

"True," she muttered. "Surely he cannot fail me!"

But eleven o'clock struck, and the company

began to move off. Edith sat perfectly still watching them as they went in parties, all gay and laughing. Agnes lingered a little — she seemed longing to say something. Once or twice she went towards the bride, then looked at her father, and hesitated and retired again. At length the bridesmaids went, and I was obliged to follow; so there we left Edith alone with her father.

"Inevitable!" I muttered to myself, as I put the last bridesmaid in the carriage, and then went back to the house to fetch the old aunt, whom I had undertaken to convey in my brougham to church.

Just then a hansom, driving at full speed, came in sight. I paused — something told me it was the reprieve. In another instant it was at the door, and Wells, looking pale and haggard, sprang out. He caught my arm —

"Has she gone?"

"No. What have you done?"

"Come up," he replied.

We dashed up stairs together, and in an instant he was standing beside Edith. He gave her a note, saying,

"He started an hour ago for Paris."

What was in the note I never knew. All

I know is, that she read it, gave it to her father, and then sat down and burst into such a storm of sobs and tears that I was fairly frightened; and that Wells, in spite of Mr. Bush's presence, flung himself beside her, and —I shouldn't like to say joined her in her tears, but he certainly looked dreadfully white, and his voice shook as he spoke; and I know that the company waited at the church till they got tired, and then they came back; and I know that there was no wedding that day.

I am not going to write of the wonder and disappointment of everybody as they came rushing back and found the drawing-room empty, and the bride and bridegroom nowhere; nor of the whispering, and sneers, and hypocritical condolences, as Georgy went about making up an awfully fabulous account of Mr. Grainger's sudden and alarming illness. All I can say is, that I don't think any one believed it; and that most people thought it a most romantic affair, wondered if Mr. Bush would make it a breach of promise case, and at how much he would put the damages; and some said, "It served that proud, conceited Edith right;" and all were, on the whole, rather pleased, as we all are, in the misfortunes of our friends.

As for Smith and myself, we were unfeignedly delighted, and went and smoked — in unutterable peace of mind — a cigar in the back parlor, waiting for Wells, who was closeted with Mr. Bush and Edith.

It was a day of dreadful confusion at No. 3 — even dinner was forgotten to be ordered; and at seven o'clock Smith and I were obliged to request Ann to bring up some of the wedding breakfast, and Georgy, whose feelings were never too much for her, joined us, and we managed for ourselves, and did pretty well, considering.

As for Wells, he came in for a few minutes, and, after recruiting his strength with a glass of champagne, told us Grainger was not likely to trouble his English friends for some time; but he would not enter into particulars — he said his word was pledged. Afterwards we learnt from his lawyer that it was a charge of forgery and embezzlement that had humbled Mr. Grainger's pride, and sent him travelling so quickly; and that a cheque for three hundred pounds had been given in exchange for a note declining the honor of Edith's hand, and another little paper that Wells had burnt even before he parted with Grainger.

The lawyer seemed to think the whole affair a good joke; but said Wells was rather "soft" not to prosecute; and to pay the three hundred pounds, when Mr. Grainger was in such a fright, he would have given him twenty notes declining any number of young ladies' hands, and little bits of paper *ad libitum*, all for nothing.

I left No. 3, H—— Terrace, and went abroad for the autumn, and the winter found me still in Germany. I loitered the spring and summer away in France; and when I returned to England, I found No. 3 empty, and the Bushes flown, no one knew where.

Smith also had left London, and was, I was told, staying in Scotland. So I drove down to Wells's place, near Richmond. Wells was out too — provoking! but the servant said Mrs. Wells was at home, would I like to see her. "Very much." There in the drawing-room sat Edith, stately as ever, and without a vestige of the housemaid about her. She received me quite warmly, and we had a *tête-à tête* dinner, and talked over old times. She was so gracious, graceful, refined, yet easily free, that I quite understood the fascination she had exercised over Wells; and it was

with intense amusement that I recalled to her memory our warfare, and how rudely she used to behave towards me.

"Ah! Mr. West," she said, "you would scarcely believe what a time of torture that was to me. How I hated you — at least your presence!"

Then she told me she had been striving and working for two years to make a hundred and fifty pounds, that at the Christmas of the preceding year, when her father expected to receive a hundred and fifty pounds, they might free themselves of Grainger.

"I know," she said, "it was a dangerous and an insincere part I played towards Mr. Grainger, encouraging him, but never meaning to marry him; but I thought the motive justified me. Still, if it had not been for my husband —"

"And Georgy," I said presently.

"Oh, Georgy is very well. She is at present flirting valiantly with Mr. Smith's cousin."

"Then I shall still find Smith a bachelor," I said, very much relieved.

Edith laughed. "Yes," she answered. "He fought bravely for liberty, and con-

quered. Will you like to come and see papa and my sisters this evening?" she asked, presently. "They live close to us; and I don't think Willie will be home before ten."

And so we went.

THE HEIRESS OF ELKINGTON.

THE HEIRESS OF ELKINGTON.

CHAPTER I.

"My father dwelt beside the Tyne;
A wealthy lord was he,
And all his wealth was marked as mine,
For he had only me.
To woo me from his tender arms
Unnumbered suitors came,
Who praised me for imputed charms,
And felt or feigned a flame."

On a dismal November morning, a silent family party were assembled at breakfast, in the library at Elkington Priory.

The cause of the gloom which prevailed will be easily explained.

The handsome, brown-haired, haughty-looking girl, who is pouring out her father's coffee (and who just now cast a furtive glance at the contents of the post-bag, arranged before him for distribution), is at this present moment

sole, undisputed heiress to the magnificent Elkington property. She is, moreover, very nearly of age, and on that day week will attain her majority: but there is no happy expectation to be read in the sparkle of those dark eyes, which, set in their star-like beauty, under the low, classical brows, have a power of their own, of which their young owner is haughtily, and somewhat disdainfully, conscious.

She is so accustomed to adulation, that it has lost its charm, and ceases to create much emotion in her feminine breast. But there is, alas! the strongest, the bitterest, and the most baneful of human passions now raging within it — the passion of jealousy, and of her twin sister, hate. It is the dull light of those smouldering fires, which burns in the beautiful eyes, and gives an expression to the whole countenance, of gloom and reserve, not natural in one so young.

The events of the next few days, which that silent family party so drearily await, are full of importance to Ella Elkington; her fate is trembling in the balance, for her stepmother is daily expecting to bring a child into the world, who, if it prove a son, will rob the young reigning monarch of the in-

heritance which for twenty years has been looked upon as her own; of the crown and the sceptre, which she has worn so proudly, and which will then devolve on a puling infant, who will be hailed as the son and heir.

The elderly gentleman who looks cowed and hopeless in the presence of the unpropitious feminine element of his family, does not appear either happy or triumphant, in the prospect of an heir in the house, of which he has been for fifty years the sole male representative; and his wife, in whom we might at least expect to detect some flash of latent joy, in the prospect of increased importance (and of what is so dear to the heart of an ambitious woman, of power), looks more sad and depressed even than her husband or her stepdaughter.

She is the prey of an undefined terror, which the rosy light of hope can neither annihilate nor dispel; it haunts her by night, and sits by her side through the day. She is no longer young; her health has latterly visibly declined, and from a strong, healthy woman, she has lapsed into a nervous invalid; she looks forward to the prospect of her approaching maternity, with feelings of unmiti-

gated fear; any allusion to it driving the blood to her heart with such dangerous precipitancy, that one who loves her so little as her step-daughter, is moved with pity for her on these occasions; and her maid, the only creature in the world who really cares for her, shakes her head in the house-keeper's room, and says, on the morning of which I speak, "My mistress will never get over it, Mrs. Bouncer. Mark my words! I tell you that she will never get over it."

To these desponding remarks Mrs. Bouncer makes no reply. She is thinking of her master, the hale old man of a year ago, broken visibly under the turbulent reign of an ill-tempered woman, enduring physical suffering for the first time in her life.

They all pitied him; his old servants and dependents pitied him; his daughter pitied him most of all. No mortal but herself had seen the tear which gathered in his eye, and trickled down his wrinkled cheek, as he sealed and directed the letter, which was to order a costly offering for his daughter on her approaching birthday. She well knew the source of it. The diamond bracelet and the lost inheritance, the sparkling jewels and the clouded fate—his

senile folly was repented, but not until it was too late; that bitter tear had a very bitter source his daughter felt, and the sight of it wrung her generous heart to the core. Flinging her warm young arms round his drooping neck, she said,

"Father, I can bear anything but this: if the inheritance I may lose could buy back that one tear — it may be hers, it may be his," she added with a strange smile, "his with all my heart and soul. Father, you *shall* not be unhappy; you have me still; not all the heirs in Christendom shall come between you and me."

Poor Ella! they maligned you who said that you were cold and heartless. If you could hate keenly, you could love with all the fervor of an ardent soul.

A dangerous temperament that, which knows no medium, whose emotions are passions, whether of joy or sorrow, of love or hate — a dangerous temperament indeed!

To explain fully the complication of family interests and feuds, which had sown strife among the inmates of Elkington Priory, it will be necessary to go back to the time of the "Squire's" courtship of its present mis-

tress; to the time when that pale, sickly-looking woman was a dashing, clever widow, and first made havoc in a breast which had been so long constant to the memory of one beloved object, that the most active feminine imagination (with one exception) had ceased to speculate upon the bestowal of its affection elsewhere.

Mrs. de Vere, the widow who accomplished the deed, had taken a cottage ornée in the neighborhood of the Priory: there are people who go so far as to say that she took it with the intention of becoming the second Mrs. Elkington, but with such slander our innocuous pen has nothing to do. We have only to mention facts; and to remark that with a reputation for flirting, more than was altogether in keeping with the widow's weeds but lately cast aside; with being freer with promises than with cheques to the tradesmen who were dazzled by her fashionable entourage; and for being not altogether what dignified, home-loving matrons call "the thing," she managed that her thorough-bred ponies, should stamp the smooth, gravel coach roads of the best houses in —— shire, and that the aristocratic and somewhat exclusive owners of

them, should eventually succumb to the intolerable pressure of boredom, which she brought to bear upon them, and allow her to consider herself, as she expressed it, "one of themselves."

In the hunting field Mrs. de Vere's upright, firm figure, which was too squarely built for grace, but which was in keeping with the showy, rather vulgar beauty of her face, was as well known as that of the master of the hounds. She did not ride much, but she attended all the meets, and was as much dreaded by the real hunting men, as she was sought by the butterfly sportsmen, who had no more idea of what the hounds were about, than the would-be Diana herself.

On one of these occasions she had been accompanied by a remarkably handsome young man whom she introduced to her acquaintances as her brother, Captain Blayne. He was not in the least like his sister, for his features were refined as well as regular, and his mouth in particular, was remarkable for mobility and beauty of expression. His manners were quiet; but Mrs. de Vere knew well enough that the nameless fascination which makes men popular with women was his, and

that he was admitted and sought after in circles which, with all her dash and daring, she could never hope to enter.

She was not without a hope, however, that these singular attractions might, in the country (where people are less on their guard against ineligible acquaintances than in town), open a road for her to a certain exclusive lady set who had hitherto steadily repelled her advances — Ella Elkington, the beauty and heiress, being one of the most obdurate of the number.

On the day in question, the young lady, she knew, would be out with her father, and she was fully determined, by hook or by crook, to effect her bold design.

It was a glorious hunting morning, and a larger field than usual were assembled at the favorite meet, "Finchley Dingle." Mrs. de Vere, mounted on a showy chestnut, which she called "Change for a sovereign," because, as she explained to her attendant cavaliers, who were rather tired of the joke "nothing went faster," gazed anxiously down the by-lane which led to the Priory, fearful that Miss Elkington would not be out after all. Her fears on that head proved groundless; an-

other minute or two, and she was gazing with envy at the graceful girl, mounted and dressed to perfection, making her courteous acknowledgements to the crowd of adherents who pressed about her horse, a hot young thoroughbred, which, against her father's anxious advice, his wayward mistress had insisted upon riding to hounds that day for the first time.

As the widow gazed (outside the charmed circle, whose limits she could not pass) at the well-set, finely-moulded head, at the neat workmanlike costume, at the elegance and quiet of Miss Elkington's whole turn out, she felt, for once in her life, that she was extinguished and outdone.

She actually blushed in uneasy consciousness of her red feather, and her loud tie; of her stamping screw, and of her fast acquaintance. She realized, at last, that there was a gulf between her and the heiress, which was as impassable as it was impalpable; and the empty and rather impertinent chaff of her young men adherents seemed stale, flat and unprofitable, now that she had the opportunity of comparing that sort of adulation with the respectful homage which the well-bred courtesy of her rival exacted and re-

ceived. Her hopes with regard to intimacy with the Elkingtons fell rapidly.

She could have worked her way with the good-natured, genial squire, but that haughty, self-possessed girl, she quailed under her supercilious stare — for so she called the somewhat amazed glance of the heiress, who had hitherto heard much, but seen little of the dashing widow, with whom she now felt she could never have anything in common.

Captain Blayne was not at that moment at his sister's side: she saw, with admiring approbation, with what easy nonchalance he entered the charmed circle, and obtained an introduction to the Squire and his lovely daughter. The first step was thus taken towards the acquaintance which she so ardently desired, and she knew that the game was in able and willing hands; for her brother possessed, in an eminent degree, that nameless fascination, which, while it insures the smiles of women, is looked upon with simulated contempt, but with inward jealousy, by the less captivating of the ruder sex.

The words "puppy, dandy, butterfly," were liberally applied to the handsome captain by those who, piquing themselves upon being

essentially sportsmen, looked upon the appearance of ladies, and ladies' men, in the hunting field, as a wicked innovation. Captain Blayne had not, as yet, shown what he was made of; or displayed the capabilities of the fine Irish mare, whose splendid condition was the admiration of those learned in horse-flesh, and whose wild, fiery eye spoke of the "lurking devil" within, which made Kate O'Shane a valuable possession to a first-rate horseman only.

"Keep clear of Miss Elkington's horse, *if you please*, gentlemen," said the rather fidgety Squire. "I wish, my dear child, you would be persuaded to ride something less cantankerous to meet hounds."

And Abd-el Kader, to keep up the character so ungraciously bestowed, commenced a series of capers and plunges, as he caught the first notes of the hounds breaking cover, which made the Squire turn pale, and the gallant captain (whose mare knew that her work was before her, and made no waste of superfluous energy in frolic at the cover side) draw without any intrusive demonstration, a little nearer to her bridle rein.

As the hounds broke away with the melo-

dious cry, which is the sweetest music in the ears of horses and men, which can wake the echoes of the winter woods, the huntsman jumped his old horse, Whiff, who was rather stiff in his joints, and required a little humoring as to the height of his fences, over a gap immediately in front of the little group, now diminished to three in number; which excited Miss Elkington's horse to such a maddening extent that he became restive, and finally unmanageable; and after shaking his head with a snort of defiance of the small but determined hands, which were equally bent upon having a will of their own, Abd-el-Kader followed the example of the hounds, and broke away, rushing down the hill side with the fury and rapidity of a torrent escaping from a temporary dam. Fortunately for the equanimity of the Master of the pack, Abd-el-Kader's excitable temperament ignored the delights of the chase so far that he did not feel it incumbent upon him to follow the lead of the hounds, who must in such a case have suffered from so mad an outbreak on his part, but struck out an original line, which he seemed bent on pursuing, heedless of consequences to himself or his rider.

Captain Blayne, who was a cool, calm young officer, not easily surprised out of his presence of mind, immediately planned a counter-evolution, whose pros he had accepted, and whose cons he had absolutely ignored and rejected, before the Squire had fully taken in that his daughter's horse was runing away, or that he was for the time being the most miserable and the most helpless of elderly gentlemen, whose whole hope in life was dependent upon one reckless stake.

Captain Blayne had determined to race Abd-el-Kader, in a parallel direction, until the superior strength and speed of Kate O'Shane, should enable him to turn suddenly and confront him, thereby arresting his course, before he reached the brook which ran through the open field over which he was then galloping with such determined speed.

Mrs. de Vere, who, deserted by her cavaliers, had been about to return home with her groom, did not lose her presence of mind either on the occasion. She reined in her showy chestnut, and hastened to the Squire's side, who, speechless, and apparently paralyzed with fright, was about to put his cob to his speed to join the desperate chase.

"My dear sir," she said eagerly, "let me advise you. Be calm. Leave Miss Elkington's rescue to my brother. He will effect it, rest assured. Do not attempt to follow them. Do let me persuade you. See, my brother gains upon Miss Elkington; his horse is a noted steeple-chaser; your daughter's has no chance against such a stride as that. He has wheeled round. He is cutting her off. Now again they are neck and neck. He would not stop her too abruptly; he has hold of her reins. Compose yourself, my dear, dear sir; and let me congratulate you. Miss Elkington is safe."

"Thank God! thank God!" said the old man, as he burst into tears, and sobbed like a child. "God bless your brother, Madam, whoever he is; he is a noble fellow! God bless him! God bless him!" And then the cob was indeed put to his speed. And with the showy chestnut and the red feather in his wake, the Squire hastened towards the spot where the blowing and foam-flecked steeds were standing quiet and at rest, while a few words were exchanged between the two who had just ridden such a headlong race, as it seemed, for life or death. The heiress never

looked handsomer, or more fascinating, than at that moment. Flushed (and her face was one which a flush became), excited, breathless, but not in the least shaken or alarmed, with the dignity that was natural to her she thanked her deliverer for his timely rescue. Cool, calm, and collected, with the deepest demonstration of respect he received her thanks, while the thought uppermost in his mind was that Ella Elkington was, without exception, the loveliest girl that he had ever seen. If a vision of her reputed wealth at the same time flashed across the retina of his mental vision, we will only remark upon that score, that if Captain Blayne was an Adonis and a hero in the eyes of every woman who ever listened to the modulated accents, which fell from a mouth moulded in nature's most perfect cast, to the author, the *valet-de-chambre* of his mental attributes, he is but a mortal man after all.

And thus the wish nearest the widow's heart was accomplished, an introduction to the family at Elkington Priory. It grew and increased beyond her most sanguine hopes; and rumor went so far as to state that the pretty heiress was not altogether indifferent

to the attentions of her brother, Captain Blayne; who made the "cottage" his home during his long leave, and on non-hunting days scarcely ever missed the opportunity of riding over to the Priory, or of driving Mrs. de Vere, whom Ella now pronounced to be a good-natured woman, but whose amusement (imprudent Ella) she generally left to the Squire, while she talked and laughed, and (shall we acknowledge it?) *flirted* with the gallant officer of dragoons, who, as might be imagined, was not in any way loath. As his leave drew towards an end he was, in fact, bold enough, upon the strength of the encouragement given, to hazard a proposal, which was declined in such a manner as not to preclude all hope.

"I cannot think of marrying *yet*, Captain Blayne," said the young heiress, haughtily; but there was a slight stress upon the last word, which seemed to hint that when the auspicious moment *did* arrive, it would be as well if it found her present companion at his post. "I shall not think of marrying until I am of age; and that will not be for two years to come."

During the spring and summer months

Captain Blayne paid frequent, short visits to the cottage, and the latter end of August saw him once more located there for his long leave. Mrs. de Vere had, in the meanwhile, worked her way so far as to be more than *tolerated* by Ella, and to be quite essential to the Squire, who was fond of the lively gossip with which she entertained him.

On one sunny August afternoon, Ella and her lover strolled together on the wide terrace walk which was enfiladed by all the windows of all the sitting-rooms in the house.

"It is very hot here," at last remarked Ernest Blayne; but as that gallant officer had encountered the fierce Indian sun with impunity, and his hardy constitution been none the worse for it, we must be pardoned if we hold the assertion that he was inconvenienced by those mild August sunbeams, in polite disbelief.

"I like it," was the lady's reply, who perhaps knew for certain what we have only hinted at, that her companion only wished for an opportunity of forsaking their rather public promenade for one of a more sequestered kind. "I like it; it cannot be too hot for me," she added, taking off her hat, and let-

ting the sun play amongst the thick tresses of hair, which only wanted more decided hues to make it perfectly beautiful. "It was somewhat of too dead a brown," young ladies, her contemporaries — who of course were the best judges in such a delicate question — said; but, however that may have been, Captain Blayne would have been very glad to have had a lock of the silken appendage to take back with him that afternoon; as an outward sign of the favor in which he believed (and not without reason) that he was held in the heart of the young heiress to the Priory, and to a clear forty thousand a year, which we believe made a very pretty background (and upon our word and honor, and in the unromantic character of *valet-de-chambre* to the young man's mental attributes, we assert it, only a *background*) to the picture of conjugal felicity, which had lately dawned upon the imagination of that aspiring captain of dragoons.

As it was not probable that so precious a gift would be made under the supervision of four footmen in scarlet plush, who were removing the luncheon from the dining-room, or of the Squire and the widow, who enter-

tained each other in the library, the tactics of the young man were to effect, at all hazards, a retreat to the conventional shady grove, in which lovers have choosen to walk from the beginning, and in which they will most probably choose to walk until the end of time.

But if the tactics proved so far successful that they allured the lady from the terrace, where she "liked the heat," they did not appear to have progressed far towards gaining the fortress besieged, for at the end of their walk in that secluded and convenient spot, the last remark which fell from the lips of the same lady was that "she detested shade."

The widow's pretty ponies had reason to remember that notable sentence, for the temper of the young dragoon was considerably ruffled as he drove his sister home, and the high-spirited animals resented the unusual rough treatment which they received, to such an extent that, if they were not running away all the way home they were doing something which had very much that appearance.

"She detests shade, does she?" said the captain to himself. "And I detest humbug. Upon my soul, it's too bad!"

Now if Captain Blayne thought Ella's con-

duct towards himself too bad, there were perhaps private reasons for his doing so. There existed, no doubt, some secret, sacred even from the *valet-de-chambre*, and which he has not the power of opening for the benefit of public curiosity. All that he can assert upon the matter is, that it is a phrase seldom out of the young man's mouth; so we must suppose him, upon his own showing, to be the victim of some more than human consummation of iniquity — some invisible league of the powers of darkness preserving the incognito of the convenient neuter "*it.*"

Does *it* freeze on a hunting morning, the neuter is arraigned at the awful tribunal of his private judgment, and pronounced, "*too bad*;" does his indulgent father decline to devote the half of his yearly income to the settlement of Young Hopeful's jewelry bill, the aspect of the neuter becomes terrible indeed, the black clouds of destiny are thereby represented, and the thunderer Jove is called upon to register and endorse the fact, that *it* is indeed "too bad." If a girl declined or evaded his suit, a trial which, it was true, he had not often experienced, the depths of the neuter's malignity no mortal could be supposed capable of sounding.

The temper of the dragoon suffered considerably from this pressure of untoward circumstances, and the pretty widow found her younger brother's society anything but agreeable, during the silent meal, to which, notwithstanding his morning's disappointment, it must be admitted that he did ample justice. Perhaps he was too well accustomed to the caprice of the young heiress, to put down the snub direct which she had given him that afternoon for more than it was worth.

If he had raised his eyes a little oftener, or with greater interest, from his well-furnished plate (Mrs. de Vere kept a first-rate cook, whose wages were punctually paid), he might have observed a triumphant sparkle in the widow's black eyes, and a slight nervous flutter, which betrayed unusual emotion of some sort, which, had her brother even not been too preoccupied or too sulky to notice, he would have been far from attributing to the right cause.

She looked particularly handsome that evening, for she was richly dressed, and was a woman whom dress became. The sheeny folds of her peach-colored silk, and the sparkle of the diamonds on her plump white

hands, gave her a brilliant, showy look; while Madame Rachel herself may have been suspected of having had something to do with the bloom of her complexion, which was bright and glowing, like that of a Hebe of eighteen.

Notwithstanding all these attractions, however, there was something about her unpleasantly suggestive of a handsome reptile: a beautiful spotted snake, a gorgeous foreign lizard, a toad with a mythical jewel crowning its repulsive head; something to admire at a distance, a splendid creature, but eugh! no nearer if you please; the very sheen being suggestive of venom, and the sparkle of the forked tongue, fit emblem of the tongue of venomous human nature, at whose hideous aspect the stoutest heart has been known to tremble and turn pale.

If the comparisons we have made sound somewhat invidious when applied to so comely a dame, we own to a certain amount of prejudice against her, in the moment of success, when her artfully-laid schemes are on the point of triumphant realization. As adversity is the test of friendship, prosperity gauges the extent of human antipathy or

dislike. I see my enemy in the hands of the Philistines, or struggling in the deadly embrace of a master in the art of garroting, and I am ready to extend the right hand of fellowship, and to perish in his defence on the spot. I see him on the pinnacle for which we are all striving, and in the struggle to gain which, we get so many more buffets than thanks, the pinnacle of success, and my enmity rises to summer heat; while I respond heartily to my friend Miss Verjuce's favorite reading of the sacred psalmist, in which she associates *all* worldly prosperity with the state of those who flourished in his time; as she ends by sententiously assuring you "like a green bay tree." In fact, she reads this verse with such terrible emphasis, when it occurs in the service of the church, that the gentleman who made his fortune in the tallow trade, and to whom the church-wardens have assigned a better pew than her own, takes it as a personal insult, and feels inclined to quarrel with his prayer-book for giving his arch foe the opportunity of endorsing a sentiment, so little in accordance with his personal opinions on the subject of worldly success.

To return to the lady whom we have un-

graciously left, in the shimmer of her jewels and her silks, lingering over her dessert in the society of her uncompanionable brother, we are bound to make the revelation which fell upon the resolute heart of that young officer like a blow, but for which the reader will have been prepared by the opening part of the present chapter. Had Captain Blayne been the less occupied with his own "urgent private affairs," he might have guessed from Mrs. de Vere's, restless demeanor that she had something of importance to communicate.

She walked from the table to the window, and from the window back to the table, and then placing her jewelled hand upon her brother's shoulder she began in the false rallying accents, in which, could a cat speak, one could fancy it addressing its little panic-stricken victim, while in the pangs of impending torture and death.

"You did not propose to Miss Elkington to-day, did you, Ernest, dear?"

"What's that to you?" was the ungracious reply; "*it really is too bad* to come and pump a fellow in this sort of way. What can it be to you, Harriet, whether I did or not?"

"Not much to me, Ernest, but a good

deal to you: whether the heiress of forty thousand a year accepted or refused a penniless young captain of dragoons, *is* I should have thought, a fact of some little importance, in which the young man's only sister might be supposed to take some passing interest. At all events, *I* do not think it a question of so little moment, and on my own account did not hesitate to secure so pleasant an addition to *my* yearly income."

As she said this she placed her hand once more on her brother's shoulder; the peach-colored silk glittered in the setting sun, and the widow's eyes shone with mischievous lustre, while after a little pause she added, "*I have consented to marry Mr. Elkington.*"

If, according to the conventional phrase, an earthquake had shaken Captain Blayne from his lounging position, he could not have appeared more hopelessly bewildered and terrified, than he did when his sister had pronounced the slowly articulated sentence just quoted — "I have consented to marry Mr. Elkington."

When the power of speech returned, the only comment he made was, "The deuce you have!" But the fierceness of its utterance

staggered even the widow, and brought a slight flush to her usually imperturbable countenance.

"I cannot give it up for your sake; if you are going to marry the heiress, a jointure of three thousand will hardly be missed, out of an income of forty thousand a year; so go in and win as I have done, Ernest," she added with a laugh, at which her more refined brother shuddered as well as frowned. We must do him the justice to own that he loved Ella very dearly for herself, and that to hear her spoken of as an object of barter jarred his best feelings, and made him for the moment hate the woman, who stood before him glittering and triumphant, in her diamonds and her silks.

But if his feelings on the occasion were fierce and vindictive, we can imagine the depth of the bitterness which stirred Ella's soul, when her father, with much hesitation and with a final burst of tears, broke to his daughter and heiress the fact of his intended marriage with the widow, Mrs. de Vere.

She stood calm, and apparently passionless, for a minute, until she had fully taken in the terrible truth, and then, with white lips, and

dry, burning eyes — for her father's tears could not move her then — she said —

"Father, it cannot be."

"It must be, my dear. I could not go back from my word. I am an old man now; and should you ever leave me, I shall be a lonely old man. Mrs. de Vere is very good to me; do not make me miserable by opposition, I beg and pray. Everything is arranged for the marriage, and it must go on."

According to the habit of weak natures, the poor old man spoke as though he were a passive instrument in the hand of fate; and as though he himself had not set the ball a rolling, and were not responsible for the course he took. But in common with weak natures too, he possessed the characteristic of obstinacy; and Ella knew that with all his deep affection for her, to hope to move him from his steadfast purpose, was a hopeless and impossible task.

If there was bitterness in the tone in which she said, "No, father, I will never make you miserable, and may you never live to repent the step you are about to take," it was but the faint echo of the bitterness which raged in her own heart, as she thought of another

mistress at Elkington as Mrs. de Vere. The love which she entertained for that lady's brother (and that it was love we may assure the reader in the strict confidence of a *téte à téte*) did not mollify her feelings in the least with regard to the widow herself. Indeed it made it doubly bitter to remember, with a pang, that had she not found his society so fascinating and beguiling, her father might never have fallen into the trap so artfully prepared, and into which she herself had stumbled with such ready haste.

And if her feelings were those of uncontrollable jealousy, when the idea of an interloper in her home, of a rival in the rule which had been so absolute and unquestioned, had first been presented to her, they rose into those of passionate hate, when, after a year passed in strife with a nature as strong and ambitious as her own, the fact was announced to her that it was possible that her stepmother might shortly present the house of Elkington with a son and heir.

This was a contingency of which, in her wildest jealousy, she had never dreamt. She who had reigned and ruled heiress of Elkington for one-and-twenty years, to be swindled

of her inheritance, ousted from her throne, by the child of a stepmother whom she hated — a child who would be called her brother. She flung herself passionately on the ground, in a deluge of tears. She had fled to her own private and particular garden, into which no one ventured to follow or molest her, since the moods of the heiress had become a subject of comment and observation in the house. There, in the shade, upon the velvet turf, with the splash of the fountain and the songs of the birds in her maddened ears, Ella gave free vent to the anguish of her soul, and utterance to convulsive sobs, which appeared to rend and tear the slight frame to the very centre.

The turf was so smooth and soft, that the sound of approaching footsteps was not heard, and before Ella could spring to her feet, or gather up the tresses of hair, which, escaped from the net which held them, were scattered in dire confusion almost to her feet, she was surprised by the presence of an intruder on her privacy, and that intruder was Captain Blayne!

He had arrived at an inauspicious moment, for Miss Elkington was not one who could

bear a witness to her agony and humiliation. It was a generous motive, nevertheless, which had caused him to seek her there. He, too, had heard the news which had blanched her cheek, and filled her heart with bitterness; and with an impulse of love which he could not restrain he had hastened to her side, to renew and confirm his expressions of attachment, to prove that the news, so unwelcome to both, had wrought no change in him.

He found Ella in no mood to appreciate his generosity, or to listen to his love story. She angrily, almost fiercely, bade him leave her to herself; she reproached him, with bitterness, for intruding on her privacy; and concluded with the words, "Henceforth, Captain Blayne, we must be as strangers to one another."

"As you like, Miss Elkington," he said, stung to the quick by her words; and raising his hat, he would have left her as abruptly as he came; but one glance at those tear-stained cheeks, at the downcast, swollen eyelids, at the poor tangled hair, towards which the small hands furtively wandered, in the restlessness of mortified pride, made his heart bleed for the only woman he had ever loved;

and, with a sudden impulse, he turned, and drawing her towards him, said, "Ella! Ella! do not send me away; who has a better right to protect you than I?"

So you see that the young soldier's heart was in the right place, and if the profession of his love was mixed with a little harmless braggadocio, we must remember that it was the language of his profession, and in the defence of aggrieved weakness that he proclaimed war. Ella had been no woman, could she have listened unmoved at such a moment to words of sympathy from beloved lips. Her head drooped for a moment on his shoulder, she felt the throbbings of the heart that loved her so truly and well; but she meant it for a farewell caress: with a perverted view of her position, she looked upon herself as humiliated, disgraced; and in low accents, which were full of the bitterness of her heart, she said, "But for your sister, Ernest, I would never have sent you away, but, as it is, we *can* only be strangers to one another — good-bye!"

And, with a passionate sob, she broke from him, although her heart was breaking as she did it, and flew to her own room, where she

remained for the rest of the day. When she joined the family party at dinner-time, she was calm, stony, composed, and heard, without the slightest outward sign of emotion, that Captain Blayne had appeared, and disappeared as suddenly as he came, "leaving no message," his sister added, pointedly, "for any one."

She wished Ella to conclude that he had slighted and neglected her, and that the possible difference in her position was the cause of his coldness.

But Ella knew better than this, and the shaft fell harmless at her feet. She answered, coldly —

"Captain Blayne was no doubt of the opinion, that a message through a third party would be superfluous, after the interview which he had with me alone. Perhaps your ready wit, in coupling it with his sudden departure, will supply the missing link. If not, I have the honor to inform you, that your brother was so good as to make me a proposal, which I was considerate enough to decline."

Was it possible that this calm, self-possessed girl, who looked like a glassy lake on

a still day, was capable of the stormy outburst of passion in which we lately surprised her? Is it, indeed, true, that the still waters run deepest, and that underneath an unruffled surface, the turbulent soul hoards the concentrated strength, that could not be released without danger to itself and others?

Day after day of weary expectation passed over that unhappy family party; while each member of it carried a load at his, or her, heart which the expected event would either bitterly increase, or altogether remove. The Squire wished as ardently that his expected child might prove a girl, as his wife did that she might live, the happy mother of a son, who would put the reins of power into her hands for many years to come. His remorse for the injury he had done his daughter, was bitter and constant, and it had aged and broken him, until he was hardly to be recognized for the same man.

"The weariest day must have an end at last," and time brings in its hand the solution of every riddle which fate gives us to puzzle out. In the afternoon of that November morning, which we described in the commencement of the story, Ella, who had been

visiting the poor, and carrying little dainties to the sick and aged, which were all the sweeter as coming from loving and beloved hands, met a groom riding furiously in the direction of the country town.

She knew, instinctively, what his errand must be, and she turned pale and faint; a few hours more, and her fate will be decided.

"Oh, miss," said a woman to whom she had been talking about an ailing child — "oh, miss, we do all pray, to be sure, that it may not be a son and ar!"

"A son and heir! — a son and heir!" said the young lady, musingly, as she threw off her hat and shawl; and then, flinging herself on her knees, with the whole strength of her passionate soul, she also prayed that it might not be a son and heir.

She dined with her father that evening once more alone — the poor, bent, saddened old man! She was lively, even gay, to cheer him, she said to herself — to console him, who, if he had injured her, had also lost his own happiness in the venture, and who was still her dear father, whom she would have once more for a little time to herself.

They both sat up till late, the accounts of the invalid being duly rendered from time to time by Mrs. Elkington's maid. The last report, before they retired for the night, was, that her lady was comfortable, and hoped they would all go to bed. The old man's hand shook, and his voice faltered, as he bade his daughter "good-night," but she was calm and unmoved. She went to bed and to sleep, while her fate trembled in the balance. A white face met her gaze as she opened her eyes in the morning light, and white lips murmured the words —

"Mrs. Elkington is dead, ma'am."

"And the child!" said a hollow voice, sick with apprehension, in reply — "And the child!"

CHAPTER II.

"Love is as strong as death, and jealousy is as cruel as the grave."

SELDOM, we imagine, has the birth of a son and heir been attended with such melancholy circumstances, as those which ushered the heir of the house of Elkington into this busy, heir-loving world.

The poor baby's mother was dead; his father would have given half his fortune to have been son and heir*less;* and his sister (or as much of a sister as that one word *step*, leaves of the diluted relative) regarded him as the unwelcome usurper, who had robbed her of her sceptre and her crown.

During the hours in which Mrs. Elkington had hovered between life and death, the infant had been almost forgotten, laid by the nurse in his tiny cradle, while she answered the summons of the wailing voice, which was so soon to be silent in the grave.

There, with pink and puckered face, bearing a grotesque resemblance to that of an old man, lay the heir of Elkington, and there, with impotent menace, he doubled his little red fist, and seemed to invite the unknown world, to which he had been so lately introduced, to a personal encounter, and trial of strength, with his baby powers of defence and resistance.

No guns — no bells — no roasted oxen — no fatted calf. The only bell which told the news of his birth, was the bell which announced to the sleeping villagers, that Mr. Elkington was a widower for the second time; and that the turbulent reign, which had brought so little joy either to himself or to his dependants, had merged into the annals of the past.

But — there was a change, and a great change — the lovely and beloved Ella Elkington, the proud young heiress, who loved the Priory as she loved her own fresh, vigorous life, was heiress of the Priory no more. The owner of the pink and puckered face, the possessor of the impotent red fist — that small and puny, that unloved and unlovely babe, represented the house which had boasted no

male representative for so many years. If that small atom of humanity had failed to retain in its grasp the flickering lamp of life — if it had ceased to evince that impotent antagonism against the world at large — if it had nestled to the side of its dead mother, and, smitten by the cold, had died, we could almost find it in our hearts to say that it had been well. Gloom, and doubt, and suspense, if nothing worse, might have cleared away from the brooding sky of fate, and for the heiress, for her father, and for the child, according to human foresight at least, it might once more have been well.

But Providence had ordered otherwise, and the tiny baby lived.

The doctor, and the wet nurse, and the late Mrs. Elkington's maid, formed the young potentate's suite. His father seldom saw him; his sister (in whom, as might be supposed, the *step* had the predominance over the relative) did not profess, or feel, any very warm interest in his behalf. She heard from time to time, that the important epochs of tooth-cutting, weaning, walking and talking were in course of progression; but, in the daily routine of her life, it was accident, and

not design, that ever threw her and her brother into momentary contact.

When he was about two years old, however, the baby potentate himself opened negotiations for a peace-footing between the belligerent parties.

"Let me go to sissy," was his constant cry, when Ella, in all the glow of beauty and rich coloring, fascinated the child's vision, and by that means touched his heart.

It was the ci-devant maid, who had taught him to call Ella "sister," or "sissy," according to the baby reading of the word. She had done it spitefully, to bring the unwelcome relationship into undue prominence; but she had missed her aim, and had failed to gauge the weakness of a noble nature.

Those lisping childish accents, those loving baby caresses, were very sweet to the warm-hearted girl. Scarcely acknowledging it to herself, she took to the child from the moment the word passed his lips; and from that time, it was not uncommon to see the "baby," as he was always called in the house, toddling in the wake of the tall and stately figure of the sister, whose inheritance he had usurped.

There was at that period a genial influence

at work on the sister's life. Experience had taught her the fact, dear to a woman's heart, that in one quarter at least, she had been loved, not for her reputed wealth, but *for herself.* Ernest Blayne had returned from abroad, constant to her charms, not to her gold, and had placed his fate once more in her hands.

He found her capricious as of old — sometimes liking, sometimes detesting, always apparently fickle and coy; but in the mine of that generous heart, he had penetrated at length to the true ore; he knew the treasure that it was, and he knew that it was his own. Ella, in a serious moment, had told him that she loved him, and he knew that it was with all her heart and soul. As they wandered in the glory of their new-found happiness side by side, either in shady groves or sunny chases, their talk sometimes fell upon "old times" — upon the dear old times, before fate had cast its shadow over the path of either — of the time when Ella had told Ernest, in the flush of her maiden pride, that she "*could not think of marrying until she came of age.*"

That period had arrived two years ago, and she was Miss Elkington still; but during the

interval her lover had been absent earning his laurels on the battle-fields of the East, and she had grown thinner and paler, and had evinced a strange restlessness foreign to her nature, and an undue anxiety in the perusal of the "Times."

Strangers thought that it was the fact of the lost inheritance, which affected her so deeply; but we have every reason to believe that a deeper and a purer grief gnawed at her overburdened heart, and that the canker which preyed upon her "damask cheek," was not that of the disappointed greed of wealth.

"When is this to come to an end?" was the question somewhat abruptly proposed to Ella, on the occasion of a delicious September stroll through the grounds of the Priory.

"What do you mean?" said Ella, archly —"our walk? Now, if you like," she added; and, suiting the action to the words, she chose a mossy seat in the shade of the trees of her own peculiar parterre, where the fountain splashed and the birds sang, as they splashed and sang once long ago, when Ella, in her terrible grief, had bade her lover so fiercely to be gone.

"This engagement of ours, I mean. When am I to speak to your father, Ella? In plain terms, when are you going to marry me? — for I think," he added, caressingly, "I think I have earned you now."

"When am I going to marry you? — that is rather reversing the order of things, Erny. I am not an heiress now, so am not to be expected to do my share of the courting business, to put your sensitive pride at its ease, and now really I think you may talk of marrying me."

"Well, that is what I am talking of, is it not? — only you will always take a fellow up so, Nelly; and you are so awfully clever, that when you do that, you always make him look like a fool."

"Don't give me all the credit of that, either — let poor Nature have her just due," said Ella, gazing, at the same time, with pride at the handsome face beaming with affection for her, and which she had seen so often in her dreams, when the cold cloud of war hung in death-like silence over the land, and whose threatening aspect was the harder to bear, for those who dared not evince the desperate anxiety which made their hearts a living sepulchre indeed.

"Let me speak to him to-day. I have come into my fortune now, Nell, and can actually offer to settle some ten thousand pounds upon the born heiress to half a million. I say, Nelly, can you ever forgive my poor sister?—or the little chap?" he added, shyly. It was the first time in all their talk, that they had approached the subject of the lost inheritance.

"The baby," said Ella, rather drily, "of course I forgive him. He is very fond of me: everybody knows that."

"And nobody wonders at it, I imagine. But, seriously, you don't wish him to have the measles, or the whooping cough, or any of the ills that little kids are heir to, do you?" And then, perceiving that she looked pale and shocked, he added, "I'm only joking, of course. Don't look so horrified, Nell."

Perhaps his words had struck some evil chord that had long been silent in Ella's heart; for she had then no suspicion of any serious meaning in them on his part.

Before the "baby" had called her "sissy"—before he had stretched his little mottled arms to be taken into hers—before, before that tacit understanding of the establishment of a

peace-footing between her and her brother, had grown from a shadow into a thing, perhaps the thought *had* occasionally flitted across Ella's mind that such ills as Ernest had mentioned did exist. That the "son and heir" was an ailing, delicate child, was a fact openly discussed in the village, where his advent had been anything but welcome, and where his dead mother had been hated, as much as his sister was cherished and beloved.

"She's a sweet young lady, she be," said a laborer's wife one day as Ella passed the cottage, with the baby by her side in the pony-carriage; "to think on her taking to that child, who has been and robbed her loike! There's not many on us who could do *that*."

On that auspicious day Ella had been driving to the station, to meet Ernest Blayne, after two years' separation. The whole world was a radiant world to her, for she had received ample proof of her soldier's constant affection; and the child, who had proved him disinterested, was a usurper and a *step*-brother no longer in her eyes.

In fact, Ella had been very happy — so happy, that she wished for no change; and

Captain Blayne's natural wish to defer their marriage no longer, was to be indulged, for his sake rather than for hers.

As they strolled towards the house she said, "As you are so tiresome, Erny, I will give you an answer to-day. I am going in for an hour now, but I will be at the fountain in an hour from this time. In the meanwhile you can go to the stables, and see if the groom has properly bandaged the horse's leg that was sprained yesterday. My poor father cannot see into things as he used to do."

As she entered the house at the drawing-room window, she met the child and his nurse; the former, catching sight of the retreating figure of his uncle, cried to go to him; and Ella called to "Uncle Erny" to look after the child while she wrote her letters, and settled accounts for her father.

So, clasping his big uncle's first finger with his small hand, the child toddled off to see "sissy's gold fish," which he was accustomed to feed with crumbs of bread. As the pair moved off, the thought flashed across Ella's mind, as thoughts the least welcome will sometimes do — "Why did Ernest ask if I had forgiven the child? Is it possible that

he regrets the inheritance?" And then, although she hated herself for the thought, she remembered all that Mrs. Elkington had told her of her brother's being fond of money, and that he had always expressed himself, as bent upon marrying an heiress.

It is a curious fact, that when our feelings have been wound up to the highest pitch of which they are capable, they are the most liable to the action of the depression of an unfavorable mental atmosphere. We reject the idea of medium; and the hero of yesterday, if he cannot be a hero to-day, must be a villain or a blackguard of the deepest dye. "I have been disappointed in So-and-so," is a sentence more often in the lips of people who possess an ardent, enthusiastic temperament, than in those of the steady-going, practical men or women, who only judge by what they see, and build up no visionary temples of perfection, on a basis of whose strength they have not had full and positive proof.

Now the Ernest Blayne whom Ella loved, and, as a natural consequence in one of her temperament, whom she worshipped, was not the real, living, tangible Ernest Blayne, that he appeared to the rest of the world to be.

That gallant young officer had, it is true, many prepossessing qualities, but he was not by any means of an heroic nature; and to exalt him into a hero, was to do him a bitter injustice — to judge him by the height of a standard, to which he could never attain.

When Mrs. Elkington said that he was fond of money, and that he had expressed his determination of marrying an heiress, she said a little more and a little less than the truth. That he was fond of the comforts and luxuries which wealth procures was true; but it was *not true* that he was fond of acquiring or saving money; or that he had said more upon the subject of marrying an heiress, than every penniless young man says jokingly to a friend or brother officer when more than usually "hard up," or extravagantly inclined. But, at the same time, we do not attempt to deny, that he rejoiced exceedingly in the prospect of Ella's reputed wealth, and that the fate which robbed her of it, had been to him a very bitter blow indeed.

If this revelation, which, as faithful chroniclers we are bound to make, should detract from the interest which our reader feels in

the man, let him throw the constancy and honest faith to the object beloved, in spite of unpropitious circumstances, into the opposite scale. He never wavered in his love for an instant. That it was not in his nature to give up her wealth without a pang, was in itself the test of the warmth and the depth of his devotion; for his honor would not have been involved, had he deserted her, after the fierce rejection to which his ill-timed intrusion had once subjected him.

But in Ella's eyes, he had been an unmitigated hero; and the unwilling doubt having once been entertained against this view of the question, made her wretched and unhappy. "Does he, then, so much regret the child's birth, that he asks me if I have forgiven him? God help me!" she said to herself, while her lips quivered with emotion, "I could forgive him anything, everything, but his making me doubt Ernest."

Ella's character was an intricate, and therefore a deceptive one. Under a sparkling, frothy surface, there ran the deep still waters of strong and passionate emotion, which, themselves unseen, stirred her being to the centre. They formed the dangerous element

in her nature, because they were suspected by none but those who had known her from childhood, before the veil of reticence had been flung over them, and concealed them from all human eyes.

Her feelings were of so antagonistic a character, that she was never very long at peace with herself. She was self-tormenting, from the strength of her love; and the hour, which she had told Ernest was to be devoted to letter-writing and account-keeping, was spent in her room, upon her knees — not in prayer, but because the posture is natural to those a prey to contending feelings, as though without utterance, they would cast themselves on His mercy who, in such wild moments of storm and blackness, can alone say, "Peace be still."

At the end of the time appointed for the meeting, which would place her hand and her liberty in the keeping of another for ever, Ella rose from her knees, bathed her face, smoothed her nut-brown hair, and wandered out in the direction of the fountain, where the compact, hitherto tacitly acknowledged, was to be signed and sealed.

Much to her astonishment, although five minutes past the time, she was there first.

She seated herself on the marble rim of the basin, and, bending over the water, splashed it over her hands, and was bending down to cool her burning head in the same manner, when her eye was caught by something white floating on the opposite side to where she sat.

She looked again, and saw with horror the pink surface of a mottled arm, floating on the water, and then a child's face and long golden hair revealed itself to her vision, with the terrible tardiness with which the sight takes in an unexpected and overwhelming horror.

The little drenched dress, the floating hair, the mottled arm, were beyond her unaided reach. She shrieked wildly for help, while her staring eyeballs and ghastly face, proclaimed the terror at her heart. Her presence of mind did not altogether forsake her. She flew to a shed where she kept her gardening tools, and there, groping feebly amongst flower-pots and garden matting, she found the old gardener, who had served her father for thirty years, and who was the only person privileged to enter and tend Miss Elkington's private garden. She took him by the arm, which trembled with age or palsy like an aspen leaf, and gasped out —

"The child, Johnson! — the child! — he is drowning in the fountain! Give me a rake — oh, for God's mercy's sake, be quick! — quick!"

She seized the rake, and returned once more to the fountain, only to rescue the little dead body, and to clasp it, cold and lifeless, in her warm, tender arms. The poor sickly child — the motherless babe — the unloved son — the step-brother — the son and heir — his little lamp of life was gone out for evermore, and Ella Elkington stood horror-struck and despair-smitten, with the little pale corpse in her arms.

And with a fearful distinctness, with some unrecognized meaning, came the words to her lips: "And where is Ernest?" They had surged and eddied in her heart, until they rose like a blight, and blanched her white lips in their utterance; but the frail old gardener heard them, and, touching her arm with his trembling hand, he said —

"Don't ask, miss — don't ask. For God's sake, let the captain go!"

And then Ella fainted away. When she came to herself the captain *was* gone — when she came to herself it was to find her home

decimated; her father struck with a long-threatened stroke of paralysis — her brother dead — her lover worse than dead — to be in that stricken heart as though he had never been.

She was heiress of Elkington once more, and she was also the most wretched and despairing woman that could bear her grief and live. She dared ask no question; for she imagined that the whole neighborhood was ringing with the news of her lover's guilt. She bore the agonizing suspense in silence for a while, and then, with the bravery of despair, she turned to the doctor, who was trying to impose silence upon those who surrounded the bed where she lay, and said —

"What has been discovered about the child? How did it happen?"

"The gardener has explained," was the reply. "He takes all the blame upon himself, and says that he was left in charge of the child by Captain Blayne, and that, missing him, he imagined he had run back to the house, and thought no more of him until he saw you."

To an attentive listener, and there *was* one most bitterly and most vitally interested, it

would have appeared as though that grave, earnest man, whose lips were white, and whose tones solemn, were supplying a cue to some criminal on a question of life or death. His hand was on his patient's pulse, as he gave the information requested — his eyes were bent sternly on the poor white face.

"Oh, don't worrit her now about the child, poor dear," said officious Mrs. Bouncer, who was swelling with the importance of being the woman to be looked to, on such a momentous occasion. "Tell her about her poor papa, and divert her mind a bit."

If a glance could have slain, Mrs. Bouncer's end had been achieved by the doctor's withering frown.

"I must insist upon your leaving the room," he said; and then, without further ado, he escorted Mrs. Bouncer with much politeness to the door, while he murmured under his breath, to the well-meaning but silly woman, "How can you be such a fool?"

Before the proper answer to so personal and startling a question had suggested itself to Mrs. Bouncer's mind, Ella had started to her feet, trembling from head to foot, livid, crazed-looking.

"Papa!" she said — "who said that about papa? Let me go to him. Is he murdered too?"

If Dr. James had in any way compromised matters with his own conscience — if he was privy to or conniving at any guilt, he was amply punished at that moment. With three gaping maids round the bed, and one incensed one within ear-shot, Miss Elkington had asked "if papa was murdered too?"

He took his place once more at her side. In one short moment, he had cast a backward glance at his long experience with regard to the strongest passion in the human breast, and he decided upon sacrificing the greater to the less — to assure her of her lover's safety, and then to brave the rest.

"Mr. Elkington is ill," he said, quietly, "and Captain Blayne has gone to town by the express train, for further advice. Directly he heard Johnson's confession he set off; and I shall write to him not to return at present; it will be best for all."

Was the little gurgling sound in Ella's throat a moan of grief, or a sigh of some burden removed? The doctor knew best; he had studied human nature from the book

of living human hearts, at bay with the bloodhounds of death — he knew which it was. He seemed again to have been supplying some missing link in the chain of some terrible evidence.

"Let me go to my father," said Ella, after a little pause; "my place is with him now."

The doctor did not oppose her wish. Perhaps he too was glad to break up an interview which was so painful to all. He gave Miss Elkington his arm, and took her at once to her father's room.

That room for many months she never left, but for the brief intervals required for rest or repose.

The remains of the poor baby had been laid in the stately Elkington vault; the necessary inquest had been held, and the verdict of accidental death returned, based upon the evidence of the gardener, who, with heart-breaking sobs bewailed his carelessness, and declared that "he never had e'er a thought but that the little un had run home."

With a reprimand he was dismissed; but the servants declared that he never held up his head again. He had been a very shrewd old man, whose principal characteristics had

been a love for his master and mistress, passing the love of women, and unmitigated selfishness with regard to everything else in the world. "The family" first; himself next; his God, and the rest of creation, nowhere. But that faithful, redeeming love had met with its due reward. Johnson was trusted, esteemed, and treated with warm regard by those whom he served. He had reaped the harvest of which he had sown the seed. If it had been with a short-sighted prudence, still here he had had his reward.

People said he was broken-hearted at the loss of the son and heir, whose importance he had always maintained; although the young mistress was in reality the most cherished idol that his old heart knew. "Still an heir was an heir," he would say; and, doubtless with a view to aggravating his wife, who was older than himself, and whom he had married for her "bit of money," anything was better than property passing into the hands of women folk.

And if Johnson was broken-hearted, what terms are left us to describe what Ella endured during the long watches in her father's dying room? The awful meaning implied in

the words, "Don't ask, miss — don't ask. Let the captain go" — still lay on her heart, and held it to the earth like a vice.

"Oh, Ernest! Ernest!" she had muttered once in the depth of her anguish, while her father slept the heavy sleep, the shadow of the sleep of death, "Oh, Ernest! Ernest!" and before the words had passed the fortress, generally impregnable, of her stony lips, she felt that she was betrayed; she was conscious of the presence of a stranger, and lifting her eyes in alarm, she met those of the white-haired, saintly old man — the rector of the parish of Elkington, who had held her in his arms at the font, and who had seen her budding into girlhood, and blossoming into womanhood, with the interest of a father, and a priest. Latterly, she had repulsed all his attempts to win her confidence, in a way which had made his benevolent heart bleed; and now that she had unconsciously betrayed the sorrow that lurked at her heart, she stood before him, whiter than statuary marble, paralyzed, trembling, glaring at him with her wild, fierce eyes.

"Forgive me, Miss Elkington," he said, with the tender dignity which was natural to

him, "if I have unwillingly overheard your words. Forgive me, and let me bring you comfort. I have a message from my Master, to the broken-hearted and the sorrowful; Ella, I have held you in these arms when you were a helpless babe — you looked up in my face and smiled; when you were older, and you thought yourself injured or ill-used, it was to the old man that you turned for comfort and redress. Have I lost the power which is all in all to one in my profession — the power to comfort, to console? Trust me once more, dear child, and I will not betray the trust."

The homely words went home to the bruised, weary heart: "Trust me once more, dear child." Poor Ella! whom had she to trust? to whom could she turn but to him, whom God had sent to guide her steps and keep her feet in the weary, weary road she had to tread until she died? With a broken sob that leapt from her heart to meet his friendly words, she flung herself on the old man's breast, and when she had wept there, as she had not wept before, since she heard the fatal sentence which told her of her lover's guilt, she said, "I will trust you, sir,

to the uttermost. I will trust you with the burden of my life, for I can bear it no longer *alone* and live." Then, kissing her sleeping father on the forehead, she said solemnly to the old man, whose eyes were full of tears, "Come with me, and I will tell you all;" and she took his hand and led him to a room where there was no chance of interruption, and, kneeling at his feet, with her long brown hair all loose over her shame-stricken face, she told him the story of the crime.

And then, with a change of mood natural to her, she sprang suddenly to her feet, and tossing her long hair from her face, she stood before him with an air of defiance and said, "And now I know what your comfort will be; you will bid me betray him; you will talk of justice, of conscience, of guilt to be punished, and mercy to be forsworn. You will say, inform against this man, this murderer; but," she added with concentrated energy, aud with a fixed, determined look of resolution, "*I will not.* Man has no right to avenge guilt, it is more than avenged *here;*" and placing her hand upon her heart, she awaited her sentence — the personification of mute despair.

The old man rose from his seat, and said,

slowly and distinctly, "Child, I judge no man; the secrets of confession are safe with me. The conscience of that most miserable man will be a punishment greater than he can bear; but," he added, solemnly, "you cannot enjoy the fruits of crime. When you come into your inheritance, you will dedicate your wealth to God, or the blood of that little child will surely cry to him from the very ground."

"That is my intention, sir," she said; "my life and my wealth, myself and my inheritance, to wash out the remembrance of the bitter crime."

"Not yours," was the stern reply; "you forget whose life, and whose inheritance were the price of a sinner's blood. Not yours, my child — not yours."

And the wretched girl, broken with suffering, racked upon the wheel of never-ceasing remorse, of poisoned love, and of weary concealment, fell once more weeping at his feet, crying, "Speak kindly to me, speak kindly to me, or I shall die."

It was a prayer not likely to be made in that quarter in vain. The aged priest raised her from the ground, and spoke calm, blessed

words of consolation, which fell upon her heart like dew; "and when we have done all this," he ended by saying, "you must seek this wretched man, and endeavor to save him."

So ended that eventful day, and Ella was comparatively at peace. He had not commanded her in God's name to betray him. The justice of Heaven did not demand his life at her hands. "Thank God!" she murmured, "thank God!"

All noticed the change in Miss Elkington's demeanor, from the grave doctor who always watched her, to the hospital nurse, who took Ella's post during the few hours which she snatched from her long watch, to devote to sleep or refreshment.

"She is as gentle as a lamb now," said the latter to Dr. James, who had casually cautioned her against thwarting Miss Elkington in one of her irritable moods; "I don't know what's come to her, she is never in a tantrum now."

"I know that she has changed," said the physician, "but I don't know how long it may last."

It lasted longer than he had believed pos-

sible, and it seemed likely that it would last for life. Ella was gentle, patient, calm, often in tears, but tears that were no longer concealed; often on her knees, often at the rectory, often in the village, where her visits were looked upon as those of a ministering angel; and often at the church, playing in the twilight soft organ music, while she pondered on the great truths of redemption and forgiveness of sins.

One evening, when she had lingered longer than usual in the holy building, she was surprised to find Johnson, the old gardener, at the church porch as she came out. Naturally spare and thin, he seemed shrunk almost to a shadow; his hand trembled so that the stout ash stick which supported him beat a tattoo upon the stone floor of the porch, and he said to her, pitifully, and as she thought, catching at her dress as she passed, "Oh, I be bad, miss; I be bad; I be going very fast: come and see me to-morrow, miss, for I shall never go up t' house no more."

"Why, what is the matter, Johnson?" said Ella, kindly, while a shudder passed through her frame, when she remembered that the old man had saved Ernest by the

crime of perjuring himself; "shall I send you anything from the house?"

"Yes, if you please, miss; but nothing will put the life into me again. I'm used up; the watch has stopped, I feels, and not all the doctors in England will set it a ticking again."

"Have you seen the doctor?" said Ella, anxiously; for Dr. James's manner had been so peculiar of late, that she entertained some undefined dread of him, and would willingly have prevented a collision between him and old Johnson.

"No; but I was a going to ask you, miss, to let him step in to-night, after he's seen the master; for I knows I be going fast."

If eyes can speak, Ella's said to the old man, "Do you mean to betray him?" but he gave no answering sign; perhaps in that dim twilight, those eloquent eyes had no meaning for him, and Ella dared not put the thought in words.

At ten o'clock the same night, just as Ella was repairing to her father's room, to keep her self-imposed nightly watch, her maid met her with the information that Dr. James had been to see the old man, Johnson, and that

he wished, if possible, to see Miss Elkington at once.

"Certainly," was the reply; "ask him up; I will see him here before I go to papa."

But, to her astonishment, Dr. James, in reply, sent a scrap of paper, on which was written, "It is a matter of importance; pray come to the library."

Ella's cheek blanched; she knew where he had been; she remembered, with a throb of pain, *the* secret which the old man possessed. She had already written an earnest note to the rector to be with him at once, and now, perhaps, it was too late; perhaps in delirium the secret had escaped his lips. She felt like a criminal as she answered the doctor's summons.

"You wish to see me, Dr. James," she said, with as much calmness as she could command.

"Yes, madam," he replied; "Johnson, the gardener, is dying, and he wishes to see you, and—" he added with hesitation, "he has also asked for Captain Blayne; can you give me his address?"

"He is with his regiment at——" said Ella, with a superhuman effort; "he must be telegraphed for; I will go at once."

"There is no immediate danger," said the doctor, rather coldly; "let me advise you to wrap up."

But Ella had fled before the words were out of his mouth. With a shawl wrapped hastily about her, another minute found her at the door of the rectory, asking eagerly for the rector.

"He has gone to the lodge, miss, to see old Johnson," said the astonished housekeeper; "he was sent for an hour ago." To the lodge, then, with burning brow and aching heart Ella followed him; and, as she stood a moment on the threshold of the door she gave up one life still dear to her, notwithstanding its guilt, as lost to her for evermore.

"Oh, my God, Thou hast forsaken me!" she murmured, and passed in.

The sight that presented itself was indeed a piteous one. The old man was wandering, and plucking feebly at the bed-clothes; but as Ella entered, he started and glared at her wildly.

"And where's the captain?" he said; "I sent for the captain, too; where is he? I must have both of 'em here."

"What do you want to say to me?" said Ella, in hollow accents; "what do you want to say about the captain? speak."

"Patience, my dear, patience," said the rector, pleadingly; "he is in no state to speak to you now. Have patience, and trust in God."

"I do trust, I have trusted," said Ella, stonily; "but He has forsaken me now."

"Not so, my child; He never forsakes. Go home now; you are of no use here to-night; to-morrow, Dr. James says that he will be himself again; there is no immediate danger; I have taken upon myself to telegraph for Captain Blayne. Go home now — go home and pray."

And Ella went home and spent that weary night, as she had been told to do, in prayer. In the morning she felt strangely calm; she had so much to bear that day, and yet some secret voice within, against the suggestions of reason, spoke to her of peace.

She remained at her father's side until the good rector came for her; and then leaning heavily on his arm, in her strong youth actually supported by that feeble stay, she set out for the lodge, where she felt that her doom

was to be sealed. Her companion, who knew when to speak and when to be silent, said no word to her until actually addressed.

"Do you think he will come?" she said.

"*He is come*," was the answer; and he added, in a low voice, "he appears strangely agitated."

No other words passed between them, and in a few minutes the two who had loved each other so well stood face to face, in solemn expectancy, at the bedside of death.

There, with awful distinctness, and with unfaltering voice, the minister of God called upon the dying man "to declare the truth in the presence of that assembled group, whose presence he had so eagerly demanded, as he hoped for mercy at the hand of God."

"Take it down in writing, sir," gasped the old man, whose breath was terribly labored, and whose voice was thick, and only audible in that awful silence.

And then a strong and strangely sounding voice broke the stillness of the room of death; and it said, "For God's sake take her away; have you brought her here to kill her? let me pass;" and Ernest Blayne flung off a detaining hand that was laid upon his arm,

took Miss Elkington's hand in his, and made as though he would have led her away.

"No, Ernest," she said, firmly; and raising her eyes to his, "I do not shrink from this last trial; I have borne more than this." And then she put her hand within his, and said, "I will stand by you still."

He looked amazed, bewildered at the innocence and dignity of her demeanor; and turning to the clergyman, said, "We are ready, sir; it is time that this cruel enigma should be solved; let that dying villain do his worst."

"Silence!" said the rector, sternly; and then turning to the dying man, he said, "Speak now, and as you love your departing soul, speak nothing but the solemn truth."

"I will, sir, I will: I sent for them that I might speak the truth, to tell them, that, as I am a dying sinner, *I did it.* I killed the little 'un. I left him in the water. Oh, God, have mercy on my sinful soul! I did it. And I told her it was the captain, and I told the captain it was her. I knowed human natur'; I knowed *them two* would keep it dark. The captain took the little chap back in his arms, and put him in at the window; soon as

winkin', when the captain went t' stable, he was back again, back to the fountain to feed the fish; he toppled over and fell in, and I let 'un be. I let the little 'un be, and he was *drowned dead.* Then it came over me that I was a murderer. I went into Miss Ella's garden-house, and the tempter came to me, and said, Keep it dark; and then Miss Ella came crazed and mad like, and the tempter said, Say 'twas the captain (here Ella felt her companion start, and his strong frame quiver with emotion), and she swooned off; and the captain came, and the tempter said, Say 'twas her. And the doctor saw me and the captain a-talking, and he suspected sommut, and he sent the captain off to fetch a London chap t' old master, who was took bad; and the captain left me a letter for Miss Ella, and I took and read it; and it said, Shall I come back ever again? and I burnt it, and said to myself, 'No, never no more; the heiress of Elkington should look higher than the likes of you.' For it was for her to be heiress again that I let the little 'un be, that I took and lost my own wretched soul. I allis loved her best; but it was never like the old times again, never no more. And this is my dec-

laration and the solemn truth, sir, as I hope for mercy on my wretched soul. I did not put the little chap in, but I let 'un be, I let 'un be."

"Clear the room," said the doctor, as the old man's head fell back upon the pillow; "clear the room, this is no place for you, madam; you must go." But Ella did not hear; she had sunk slowly on her knees, and with clasped hands and glazed eyes, had listened to the awful revelation like a woman in a waking trance.

"You must come with me, my love," said Ernest, stooping and kissing her reverently on the forehead; "you must come with me."

And rising from her knees, and putting her arm within his, she instinctively obeyed him; those two had, indeed, passed through a fiery furnace of trial, to be restored to one another at last.

The old man, with wily craft, had taken in his situation at a glance. The temptation had been too strong to resist, when he saw the little life which alone stood between his cherished mistress and "the property," drop of itself, as it were, into eternity. He let

him be, as he expressed it; and then the consciousness of deadly guilt sharpened his naturally shrewd wit, and suggested a plan by which he could effectually keep it dark. He told "her it was the captain," and he "told the captain it was her;" and the natural consequences of flight upon his part, and silence upon hers, confirmed his accusation in the minds of each.

Dr. James had suspected some connivance between Captain Blayne and the gardener, having mistaken the letter which he had confided to him for Miss Elkington, for money; but without further grounds to go upon, and in the state of affliction in which the family was plunged, he resolved only to watch and wait; and the evidence given by Johnson at the inquest was considered conclusive by the somewhat incompetent jury, summoned hastily to attend at the Priory.

The hours of fiery trial, which the crime of one wretched man had brought to two faithful hearts, had purified and elevated both. Ella's proud and rebellious heart had humiliated itself in the supposed guilt of one in whom her very existence was merged and blended; and to Ernest, the revulsion of

feeling of knowing his intended bride, not only innocent of crime, but pure and spotless as a saint, formed the basis of love stronger than death, and made him an eager participator in the wish expressed by Ella, to devote a large portion of her boundless wealth to charity and good works, so that in the whole country side there is no name held in more reverence, or spoken of with more affection, than that of the once proud, reserved, and little understood Heiress of Elkington.

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